We are all the children of our generation,

We must all be the eyes, ears, voices, and conscience of our times.

The '70s

(Dekada '70, English edition)

LUALHATI BAUTISTA

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Intro by National Artist Bienvenido Lumbera 1
Foreword by the author 5
Notes on the translation 11
What they say about Dekada '70 15
Chapters 1-32 17-303
And the struggle continues 304
Author's literary and recognition awards 317
About Bienvenido Lumbera 323
About the translator 324
About the photographer 325
Author's other books 326

Introduction

THERE ARE DIFFERENT reasons for introducing a novel. This introduction of Lualhati Bautista's *Dekada '70* is to call the reader's attention to the first-ever novel in Filipino that dares to write about our society at a time when it was going through changes that, until the present time, are still taking place.

Undoubtedly, Bautista's novel is daring and fearless. The decade that gives title to her novel is an era that, by all indications, is still far from over. Almost every reader that the novel reaches has his own interpretation of this particular chapter in our national history, each interpretation pursuant to the reader's own perspective. That Bautista's perspective runs counter to the official standpoint magnifies her novel's audacity even more.

Dekada '70 serves as prelude to the reassertion of the writer of the freedom of creative imagination. In the time of martial law, the imagination of the writer was forced to submit to the restrictions of the era so as not to jeopardize the chance for the manuscript to get published. It is for this reason that many writers became prisoners of topics that are narrow if not cliché, evasive if not outright escapist. In *Dekada '70*, the critical and accusatory spirit of the pen that fueled Philippine literature in the 1960's will be felt once more, the same spirit that gave the anthology *Agos sa Disyerto* (Flow in the Desert) its effectiveness and power as a compilation of short stories that reflect the forces of change that the nationalistic movement unleashed.

Bautista's novel, after being read as a creation, will probably be scrutinized for qualities of truthful narrative about the era it tackles. If truthfulness will be based on the evidence of historical data presented and examined, the novel will certainly be judged as insufficient. But then, that is not the yardstick by which the truthfulness in a work of imagination is measured. The truthfulness of a creation is in the author's grasp of the principal spirit that gives the era the character that sets it apart from the previous eras. Bautista tackles that very spirit of change as the mark of the 70's, and this is characterized by the central sensibility of the novel: Amanda Bartolome, resident of a village in Metro Manila, mother of a middle class family, wife of an engineer, "Mom" to five sons, and most importantly, has a mind open to the ideas born out of the changing times.

There certainly are many mother characters that come and go in our literature, theater, movies, television, radio, and comics. But very few mother characters stand out as their own persons. In works written in Filipino, there is almost only one mold where mother characters emerge from—the Virgin Mary in the passion of Christ, a caring mother, selfless, forgiving, a one-of-a-kind mother with her sensitivity and (noticeably) mediocre intelligence. Amanda Bartolome is vastly different from them.

It is to the observant and critical art of Bautista that the individual comes alive, moving, feeling and thinking, behind the chapters of *Dekada '70*. As a storyteller, Bautista has always displayed excellence in portraying believable characters. With her use of a flexible style of writing, this excellence is further enhanced by the freedom to follow the movements and musings of the main character side by side with the events taking place in the lives of the other characters. Aside from the light and fast-paced stripping of the fibers of the story, the gradual shaping of Amanda's personality creates great excitement to see the novel through.

Although the title of the novel summons attention toward the historical elements of the work, Bautista's triumph is in the characterization of a woman aware of her own identity as an individual at a time when the society she belongs to is being assailed by change. Even at the beginning of the novel, Amanda Bartolome's personality is already fully formed. The journey towards the end bears witness to the decisions and actions of Amanda in the face of the domestic and historic events unfolding before her eyes. And as we follow Amanda Bartolome's transformation, we also confront that chapter in our history which makes us realize that the military rule to which Philippine society was subjected to, is an anvil that shaped, hardened, and sharpened the identity of a people involved in the progressive flow of change.

Some linguists have stated their reservation about Bautista's language in *Dekada '70*. The combination of Filipino and English that is commonly called "Taglish" is not the Filipino language one sees in Bautista's other works. In the novel, the language between the reader and the content signifies the social class Amanda Bartolome belongs to and also symbolizes the dynamic psychological process that the character goes through. Therefore, Amanda Bartolome's "Taglish" is a literary technique essential in giving life to the main character, who is also the central sensibility that serves as the conduit to what the writer wants to say and express about the Filipino in the 1970's.

Bautista's novel will definitely encourage other writers to follow suit. In the coming eras of our literary history, many more writers will go back again and again to the decade Bautista narrated. Regardless of how the critics judge the novel in the future, no one can deny that Dekada '70 cleared a path that is both significant and meaningful.

BIENVENIDO LUMBERA
(National Artist for Literature)

(translated from the original introduction
written in 1983)

Foreword by writer

MANY PEOPLE HAVE been asking me whether Dekada '70 is autobiographical, whether I am Amanda Bartolome from whose point of view this novel is told. So I had to reread Dekada to see if there really are striking similarities between us.

Yes, we do have similarities. But then, all women have similarities... especially when they are also mothers.

Amanda embodies the ordinary women devoted to looking after their home and family. I see these women everyday, in the neighborhood, among my friends and relatives, and daily I become more and more convinced that no matter how dedicated they are to their role as mothers, there remain in their hearts the desire, either secretly or openly, to have more time for themselves and to find the opportunity to become more than just wife and mother.

To be a mother is not to be a perfect human being and we mothers, everyone of us, commit small and big mistakes in our everyday roles, about which sometimes we cannot easily forgive ourselves. If we think the child has done something wrong, we take the blame for it, thinking that we somehow failed to rear him toward the right direction.

There is no question that a mother wants only the best for her children. She aspires to realize her own fullfillment through them which may sometimes cause unreasonable demands. If the child is a girl, she keeps her from making mistakes she herself may have made at one point in her life; forgetting that mistakes are also part of a person's learning process. She bestows on her daughter a dream that she failed to achieve, and without meaning to, takes away from her the chance to endeavor on her own and discover her own sense of being.

Still, no matter how high her ideals for her daughter are, or even if she allows her the freedom to be what she wants, wittingly or unwittingly, she also steers her toward the same path she has taken, the path to being wife and mother. Because the culture and tradition which defines that a woman's primary responsibility is in the home is so deeply ingrained in her consciousness that she never takes time to analyze the woman situation, but instead, accepts it as the end all and be all of her being. As she takes on the role of wife and mother, her vision for herself is set aside, and because she is not considered to be in the same league as her husband to begin with, she herself ignores her right to expand her horizon and be her own person.

In one part of the novel, I borrowed the words of the poet Gibran Kahlil Gibran, reminding us that a child is not a parent's possession, but I hope I was also able to put across the message that this should hold true to everyone. For whatever a woman's status in life is, she should remain her own person.

As a mother, I have realized early on, as early as when my firstborn was barely able to turn on his belly, that a child is born already gifted with a mind of his own—making his own decision as to who among the people around would he allow to carry him for example, or whether he was in the mood for some peek-a boo... and to me it was a preview of things to come: that when he grows up, it is him and him alone who would choose his own path and carve his own destiny. Children may fall and get hurt along the way, but mothers cannot always break their fall, simply because there are things beyond a mother's control. Life is full of problems and setbacks, but all these experiences are essential in molding the characters of people.

As a baby, a child cannot immediately know the difference between a boy and a girl. But soon they imbibe the subliminal message behind the dissimilar ways boys and girls are schooled in. While girls are conditioned to be well-behaved and domesticated, boys are allowed the rough and tumble games that sharpen their reflexes and make them more decisive if not aggressive. And because a whole society also has a hand in raising a child, a society that does not allow boys to be homebody and too attached to their mothers, the son weans himself away from the mother at a much younger age, becomes more free and thus more difficult to handle. It is for this reason that I decided all boys for Amanda.

As I wrote this novel, my son Lev has just turned thirteen and I have already collected many sighs and laughters involving him, and so I had that for starter. Even then, the novel would not materialize with my limited experiences; I needed to borrow the experiences of other mothers. I thought about my mother and the countless times she called me on the phone in the late hours of the night to check if either of my two brothers have not dropped by my house because they were supposed to be home from school many hours ago.

I also thought of my mother-in law and how agitated she had always been while the radio blared the chaos and the number of dead in a rally participated in by her activist sons. What about the depth of another mother's sorrow when, after days of looking for her son, his body was found in a garbage bin behind Ramada Hotel in Manila? *Boyet, his name was, had seventeen stab wounds, some going straight to both his lungs and his heart. There were marks of wire bound on his wrists, his elbows skinned, his thighs and knees ripped, his testicles crushed.* This is exactly how I narrated it in Jason's case... no more, no less.

As I went over and over in my mind the experiences that several mothers I know went through, the characters and growing-up years of the sons gradually became complete in my mind. And when I started thinking of the novel in terms of the political conditions of the '70s. I reviewed all the reading materials in my possession, both legal and illegal, and before I was done writing, books, magazines, newspapers, and newsletters were scattered all over my room one would be hard put to find a space to walk on. For although the events of the past ten years were clearly etched in my mind, I needed to confirm the dates, places, names, details, and chronology of events. The very flesh and blood and life of the novel are the experiences of real people whom I knew and loved in the course of that time. Willy, for example, is Bodjie, a friend who had a brief but meaningful role in my life. I will forever remember him as the friend who rocked my child to sleep and one who always tried to negotiate peace between me and my husband whenever we had a misunderstanding. He was not killed in battle; the military captured him, wounded but alive, and brought him to a military hospital where he was tortured to death, the fibers of his flesh destroyed, vital organs thrown every which way inside his body. Lying in the morgue for several days, the military finally felt mercy and returned him to his grieving mother. When I saw him in his coffin, the maggots crawling over his face did not escape my eyes.

Amanda Bartolome, as I have said, is a collage of various women I know, including myself. I made her say the line, *"You're a father now; where were you when your son was being born?"* although in reality it was a question posed not by a mother but by a wife. I also gave to the mother a wife's ordeal of searching for her husband following his capture and finally seeing him and learning of the unspeakable torture he suffered in the hands of the military. I am both a mother and a wife; is there much difference in the depth of helplessness a woman experiences in this situation?

The novel was also an attempt on my part to define a mother-in law in a positive light, far removed from the tired and trite portrayal of mothers-in law common in our literature, tv dramas and the movies. Mothers-in law can also be kind and accepting and it is always possible for them and the daughters-in law to develop a relationship separate from the man, and retain that relationship even when the marriage of son and daughter-in law reaches rock bottom.

This novel served as a treasure chest for many of my personal thoughts and emotions and in the end served as my personal tribute to a lot of people. I attempted—and I like to think that I succeeded—to say the things that I have not personally said to the people concerned. To my mother, just like I told her jokingly one time, we have evened up the score because I, too, am a mother now. She was right when she said that with the many compromises and giving-in a mother makes as her children grow, she also grows up along with them. To my father, who is always tolerant and easy on his children, who never demanded obedience because, as he once lamented, I would only understand the sentiments of a parent when I become a parent myself. I also want my mother-in law to know that I still, and always will, regard her as a friend even though we have not seen each other for quite a long time.

LUALHATI BAUTISTA

(translated from the original foreword
written in 1983)

Notes on the translation:

TRANSLATING WORKS FROM Filipino to English can be quite challenging. There are nuances in the Filipino language that have no exact equivalent in English. When we say *"buwis-buhay"* for example, roughly translated, it means "laying one's life on the line", but it does not capture the playful tone of the idiom. However, the translator often sticks to literal translation so as not to risk losing anything along the way, except that literal translations can sometimes come out bland and unspiring.

This translation is actually done nearly three years ago but took such a long time to see print because, as I do with all my other works, I would let it rest after every editing, sometimes for months, read it over and then reedit until I was perfectly satisfied it has come out equal to, if not better than, the original. I had to reconstruct sentences that did not impact on me as an "ordinary reader", wracked my brain finding alternative words to some phrases that I felt would not effectively convey a particular idea I wanted to put across, added a little scene here and there to better establish, for example, the father's undiminished love for his son even as he struggles to grasp the full meaning of the life the young man chose to embrace.

Those who have read the original edition of the novel may have noticed that I had also interchanged a few paragraphs to give it more clarity. Dekada being just my second novel, I have not at the time "mastered" the art of continuity.

There are also parts in chapters 18 and 23 that made me uncomfortable. Jules leaving the car outside the garage, right there on the street when he brought home a wounded comrade should not be the case because he was in the movement and people in the movement were conscious of their security at all times. An unfamiliar car parked outside their gate will attract the attention of the neighbors and make them curious especially since, after being away for so long, he suddenly appeared in the middle of the night. So I had to have him bring the car inside the garage at least partially hidden from the neighbors' view.

In chapter 23 of the original novel, Julian left to Amanda and Em the most difficult task of looking for Jules at the military camp, knowing fully well that his son had fallen into the hands of the military and that those captured are sure to be subjected to torture and perhaps killed. It will be too unusual for a father to do that, especially for Julian who is shown to love and respect his son's ideals even as they are contrary to his own, and even opens his house to his comrades at the risk of their own security. I just had to include him in the search for his son just as I did in the film version of the novel, thus added a little scene that will define the first meeting between father and son in such setting and circumstance.

Other than these, I felt I had to expound a little on a few things for the millenials and the non-Filipino readers for better

appreciation of both the events that took place during the '70s and the thoughts of the main protagonist.

I have not read Dekada in full even when I was writing the movie script because I knew every scene and situation by heart. Reading it 35 years after I wrote it became a nostalgic trip back to the days of martial law. I have reconnected with the characters, experienced as deeply as before Amanda's loneliness and persistent feeling of abandonment and Julian's inner struggle while he sets his children free to walk their own directions and author their own destinies. Being a parent really is a most difficult job. Because it is not simply bringing a child into this world and feeding their bodies with food and their minds with education. It is also an endless preparation for their lives ahead, an endless dreaming for their future, an endless worry, the golden thread that makes for a strong and unbreakable connection with their hearts and soul.

LUALHATI BAUTISTA
March 4, 2021

what they said before:

"Definitely a political novel. More than the individual story of a mother watching her children grow and plunge in the Real Life, Dekada is an indictment of martial law, and here Lualhati minces no words -***Female Forum, Nov. 21, 1983***

"That kind of unputdownable novel that hits you like a stinging slap on the face. It jars you out of complacency as it uncovers the reasons behind the ills that currently plague our country." – ***Cinema, SGP official organ, May-June issue, 1984***

"Written even before the assassination of Senator Benigno Aquino, the novel surprises and delights with its bellicose and defiant pro-people stance in these days of between-the-lines-journalism, self-censorhip, and multi-million peso libel suits. Where other writers would balk and simply hint by using vague metaphor and parallel cases, Bautista in a supposed work of fiction, name names, cites actual atrocities and points an unerring finger where the blame lies." – ***Veritas, Sept 16, 1984***

"A literary piece every Filipino, concerned or otherwise, should read at least once." – ***WHO, Feb 22, 1984***

"Surely, Dekada '70 will have its place in the history of Philippine literature. This is the first novel that tried to answer the questions of our present times and in a language easily understood by the common Filipino." – ***(translated from Filipino) Malay, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, La Salle University, 1984***

"A moving documentary of a turbulent decade in the history of contemporary Philippine society as seen from the point of view of a strong feminine individual. It shows how literary artists can still effectively use their talents and skills of communication despite the very real threat and dangers of censorship." – ***Sunday Magazine, Nov. 24, 1985***

what the young generation are saying now:
(comments taken from Goodreads)

"Absolutely amazing book! One of those rare required readings for high school that didn't feel like homework. She captured the era so well that it gives later generations (like me!) a chance to relive it and appreciate the freedom we were born with." —***Molly***

"What I love about this book is that you don't have to change any of the details for this to resonate with you. The subjects of sexism, patriarchy, abuse of government power, corruption, martial law, freedom fighters, and extrajudicial killings are not tales of a distant past. They are, in fact, things we see every day until now.". -***Munting Aklatan*** *(little library)*

"With the strong feminist approach, tragic tone and emotionally intense and heart-wrenching plot, it is not surprising that the novel won several literary awards. It is a historically and socially significant novel that I believe requires more attention" —***Aj, The Ravenous Reader***

"I learned a lot of how things used to be when Martial Law was implemented. Besides, I do admire this great writer's works. I love the succinct way of her storytelling; the impact it gives are very good." — ***Mirvan Ereon***

"Lualhati Bautista brought me back to that time and allowed me to feel the brutality of that era. I thank her for further opening my eyes." . -- ***Astrid Sison,*** *July 10, 2014*

"This novel is still relevant today. Despite the time change, the Philippines is still beset by oppressive people and their wickedness. Dekada '70 is truly a remarkable novel highlighting the importance of compassion, fortitude, equality and most especially, the ability to speak and fight for what one think is right."-***Mary Nicole.***

Chapter 1

"God made a world out of his dreams,
Of magic mountains, oceans and streams..."

WITH DUE APOLOGIES to the poet who remains anonymous to this day, I am taking the liberty to appropriate his poem as prologue to this long long story, to sum up the many indulgences that make men the way they are—although I will only be talking about the men in my life: Julian Jr., who, being the firstborn, was regarded by Julian Sr. as an extension of himself, and so named him "Julian" at a time when it was in vogue for the Filipinos to name their children "Michael", "Lawrence", and other names of colonial descent; Isagani, that Julian named after my favorite cousin who was killed in line of duty as a police officer— also to appease my disappointment because I was then hoping for a girl; Emmanuel, which in the Old Testament was the foretold name of the Messiah.

The poem above, printed against a background of seas and mountains, was a gift from Julian—the cardboard paper mounted on plush velvet —when I gave birth to Emmanuel, to defend God's will to give us only boys, although no matter how I wrack my brain thinking about it, God could not be in the same room watching us while we were... ahem, going about the motions of creating Emmanuel (otherwise, shame).

"Prairies and plains and wooded land,
Then paused and thought, I need someone to stand
On top of the mountains to conquer the seas,
Explore the plains and climb the trees.
Someone to start out small and grow
Sturdy, strong like a tree and so...
He created boys..."

There. Chauvinistic, ain't it? It was allegedly boys, not girls, who were created to rule the mountains and conquer the seas. "Well, it's a man's world, honey," Julian would say. Forgive him for using English more than the average Filipino, and for being "colonial".

Our colonial mentality finally surfaced when Jason was born and we gave him an American name. By that time, I was already well aware that it is the male's sperm that determines the gender of a couple's child, and I resigned to the fact that maybe Julian did not have what it takes to beget a daughter.

But somehow, my hopes were raised again when I got pregnant shortly after Jason's fourth birthday. I said to myself, who knows? By some miracle, we might still have a girl this time!

No dice. Our luck brought us boys down to our last child. I named him Benjamin. Meaning, the last son. Because after I gave birth to him, in my frustration, I got myself ligated.

"And when God completed the task He'd begun,
He surely said, 'That's a job well done!'"

Okay, fine. But sometimes, I can't help feeling resentful towards God. He gives you five sons and presto!... He expects

you to know how best to deal with them. Of course in my opinion, my sons are wonderful children—all mothers have wonderful children in their own opinion after all—but I doubt whether anyone in the neighborhood, from the left to the right up to the last house in our village, would agree. The Bartolome boys did not exactly have the best reputation among the homeowners. They grew up famous for accidentally breaking glass windows, letting the air out of a car tire, running over a row of flowers with their bike, pulling down a TV antenna with a kite string, and so on and so forth. And how can I ever forget the day Mrs. Dora barged into my house?

"Uhm, Amanda... this is not a social call so there's no need to ask me in."

"Okay, Mrs. Dora," I was already bracing myself for the worst. I'm used to the complaints by now. "Is it Jules... or Isagani this time?"

"It's Emmanuel."

Ah, my smartest son! I can bet my bottom peso that even his mischiefs are carried out cleverly and geniusly.

"I do not like the stories he told my daughter Elizabeth."

"Horror stories, I presume, Mrs. Dora?"

"No. The story of how your cat Rose *got pregnant*! Who got her pregnant, when she got pregnant... and how animals get pregnant exactly from the same course of action father and mother engage in that makes the mother get pregnant! Believe me, Amanda... it was very detailed!"

"Um, Mrs. Dora... they have biology class in school."

"Not in the fifth grade!"

"I mean, in high school."

"Jules is the one in high school. I think you'd better talk to him. Tell him that there are things that he shouldn't be telling fifth graders."

"I will."

"And, Amanda?"

"Yes, Mrs. Dora?"

"When you talk to your Jules, don't believe it when he says he learned his biology in school."

"He did not learn his biology in school?"

"School isn't where you use the word fucking!"

Jules and Isagani grew their hair long, got fond of wearing faded T-shirts and denim jeans and sneakers, and although to me they looked like rock stars, their appearance did not sit well with the middle-class neighbors, especially those who are into the operatic songs of Lucio Pavarotti and Placido Domingo. One time, Em burned some cable wires in the middle of the street that he and Jason took from who knows where, to expose the copper inside because the copper, they said, is the only part of the cable that the junk shop weighs and pays for. The smell of burnt rubber filled the air and the sight of blackened curtains and clothes drying in the frontyards horrified the neighbors.

Sometimes too, in the early hours of the morning, the boys would be engaged in rough and tumble games right there on the street, and long before New Year, there could be the explosion of firecrackers placed in tin cans waking up the neighborhood. Isagani chased down Mrs. Fuentes' gay son, and Jason asked Baby Lou to open her palm and close her eyes, then placed in her hand the worms he planned to culture and turn into hamburger. Baby Lou of course went into hysterics. Em kept the baby mice he said he would use in an experiment in Mrs. Aning s backyard, and Mrs Aning almost had a heart attack. Of all the creatures in the world, Mrs Aning is most phobic of mice. He also made our pet monkey and Mrs. Adriatico's pet rabbit "mate with each other" so that "we would know how a crossbreed would look like". When our monkey finally let go of the rabbit, the poor creature was already dead. Jason got into a fistfight over the issue of how a grasshopper jumps.

I think it got to the point where most of the neighbors have become convinced that all the mischiefs and misbehaviors that intrude into their homes, from the first cuss word that their child learns to say to the prank callers in the middle of the night, are all the misdoings of the Bartolome boys.

And they blame me for that?

What puzzled me was that they seemed to be disgusted with me and me alone. They stopped talking to me altogether but remained gracious to Julian Sr., as if he had totally nothing to do with the Bartolome boys.

"Let them be," Julian would say. As always, he would not take me seriously. "Just keep in mind that your sons and I do not dislike you at all. We love you. Truth is, this father even loves your sons."

Which never fails to make me smile. "Thank you, sir!"

"You may not realize it... but I love your husband, too," he added with a grin, referring of course to himself.

I took a deep breath. "I love my husband, too. But no matter how hard I think about it, I can't understand why the neighbors are only mad at me. Why don't they feel the same way about you?"

"They?"

"The female neighbors."

"Oh, them," Julian grinned wider. "Because they are women... and it's impossible for women to take things against men. It's a man's world."

"Great. I've heard that before."

"Naturally the mothers still give me their best smile. Their daughters remain pleasant to me and to the boys. They look up to us and adore us. It's a man's world."

I rolled my eyes in mock disgust. "This is a recording."

Speaking of records, let's be fair about it and talk about my sons' good records after ranting about their misbehaviors.

Jules has always been active in campus activities. He enjoys such tremendous popularity and won hands down when he ran for president of the student council. Isagani participated in the exchange visitors program sponsored by the US government and spent a few weeks interacting with students in California—part of strengthening the ties between the two countries. Em won in an interschool spelling bee contest; and Jason, what he lacks as a student he makes up for by being a wonderful son—he once snitched a bunch of flowers from someone else's garden to gift me with one Mother's Day. And Bingo somehow manages to behave to the best of his ability as he is wont to say, in every children's party and kindergarteners' educational trip.

Looks to me they're finally endearing themselves to the neighbors when Mrs. Dora started smiling at me again, and Mrs. Adriatico seems to have forgiven me for the untimely death of her rabbit. In fact, both Mrs. Dora and Mrs. Adriatico are coming to the house tomorrow evening for a little get-together.

This evening while we are having dinner, the following conversation unfolds:

Jules, out of the blue: "Mom, do you believe in what the doctors call 'conditioned reflexes'?"

Me, puzzled: "Conditioned reflexes? What does that have to do with some neighbors coming over tomorrow?"

Jules, ignoring my question: "Conditioned reflexes. For example, when you're riding your bike and you're about to crash into Grandma Asyang's roses, you suddenly maneuver the handle like this. You don't think about it, you just do it. Pure reflex action."

Gani, seconding the motion: "Something that any attempt to control will be disastrous to one's health."

Me, still puzzled, nodding slowly. "Okay. Go on, Jules."

"Now, Mom: whenever I see Mary Ann Adriatico, or when Gani sees Mrs. Dora's daughter Pamela, we are conditioned to roll our eyes. And if ever we are compelled to partner with those two at a party for example, the wind might blow into our eyes and keep them rolling forever."

"Oh?"

"Just imagine us with our eyes rolling forever, Mom!"

"I don't seem to understand what you're getting at."

Gani, trying to go straight to the point: "In other words, Mom... Mary Ann and Pamela have long been wanting to... you know, wanting to..."

"What do you mean, wanting to...?"

Julian, Sr., with a guffaw: "Wanting them! The girls want them, what else? Just like you wanted me when you and I were younger! The girls like them, they have a crush on them. They are after them! Like you were after me a few years back!"

Gani, clucking his tongue: "Exactly, Mom! From the day school started, wherever Jules and I happen to be, they make it a point to be there, too!"

Jules, in a very serious tone: "Now, Mom, we are having this acquaintance party in school. And Mary Ann told her friend, who told my friend, that we are going to be partners because you and her mom are friends. What we're worried about is that, their moms might get you to convince us to take them as our partners. Gani and I talked about it and decided that, okay, for your sake, we will be absolute gentlemen to them tomorrow when they come over. But we hope you won't fall into the trap and commit us into taking their daughters as our dates?"

Gani, very seriously as well: "Mom, we know how much you want to be accepted by the neighbors... but we can't have our eyes rolling for the rest of our lives!"

And Julian Sr., with a wave of his hands, a short speech: "All right, hon, your sons have laid their cards on the table. Before you know it, your sons would become official men of this world... this world created for men... where women like you are like leaves withering in branches, waiting for the smile and attention of men like us. Until we take pity on you and allow you to be part of the joy and glory of this earth. Nothing you can do about it. *That* is the law. It's a man's world."

I was so dumbfounded I just gaped at them. By golly, I almost did not notice that my sons are fast growing into men!

Chapter 2

JULIAN BARTOLOME Sr. is the grandson of a feudal landlord with aristocratic blood and pure Spanish heritage. Not surprisingly then that he was raised in a milieu where men are perceived to be the power-wielders in society and women are, or should be, their mere subordinates, who have no right to speak about issues concerning business and politics.

My family also belongs to the middle class. But although we can afford to host parties and go on annual vacations, I had a father who believed that higher education is mainly, if not exclusively, for sons; that the woman's place is in the home, that her most sacred duty is to get married and make a home for the husband and bear his children, and that her own personal needs and desires are not and should never be her priority.

That I speak the English language with a certain fluency is not due to any amount of college education, but because English is the second language in the bourgeois household that I grew up in.

My mother believed every word that my father said. Forever humble and subservient to him, she, wittingly or unwittingly, passed to her children her views about the respective roles of men and women, including but not limited to— for this topic is forbidden even (or especially) in bourgeois households during the forties and fifties— the Victorian shenanigan that women should be pure and virginal; virginal in the sense that even in marriage, her own sexual desires should not obtain but remain subject to the needs of her husband. That she must always be ready and willing when her husband's need arises—like some muscle-pain reliever intended to ease the tension in his body so he can sleep well after a day of toil and fighting it out in the corporate world, or whatever field of work he is in.

But women (all humans for that matter), even if their bodies are bound or locked in chastity belt, are gifted with a kind of freedom that no one can invade much less take away: the freedom to think and unleash her own imagination. Even in my early teens, I have sometimes been preoccupied with sexual thoughts (I'm already somewhat liberated as I write this so I don't feel as embarrassed anymore about mentioning the word sex, because sex is sex no matter what you call it), and oftentimes I wondered how it would feel to be kissed by a man, or the proper way I should conduct myself if a man had sex with me. If I would not feel awkward taking my clothes off, and whether my mother took her clothes off when my father had sex with her.

But if a woman has no qualms about taking her clothes off, wouldn't the man think that she is used to having sex, that she is a low-class woman? And that, to a man, is immoral, shameful, and unforgivable.

Whatever. Back in those days, a "decent" woman did not just have sex with a man unless she was blessed with a marriage

certificate that assured her of God's go signal, and until Julian and I got married, I have never even experienced being kissed by a man.

I have no idea where this bullshit came from, but the other important reason why we were not supposed to even think about sex was that it might lead to our "playing" with that part of our body that, other than washing it, we were not allowed to touch because doing that, people said, can cause pimples. And so at sixteen when I had my first pimple, I could not face anyone, especially my father, because they might see it as a telltale sign of me touching my own body and that, again, is immoral, shameful and unforgiveable. Back then, women did not even have the right to their own bodies.

Now, regarding Julian:

That he has some funny side is not to say that he is easy for any woman to live with. His joke about the world being made only for men is actually one of his most unwavering convictions. Yes, he is a good husband if we go by the yardstick by which men are usually measured, which is the amount of money he makes. He built me a house worth seventy thousand pesos (in 1952) and he has a calm disposition both as husband and father, but he does not possess the qualities of today's generation of men, which to my mind are both liberated and liberating. From our firstborn to our youngest for example, he had never even attempted to change diapers or help around the house even when I was still recovering from childbirth, as if those chores were all beyond him.

A maid; that is always his solution to problems in those particular times. We need to find a maid.

Or your mother. Maybe your mother can help around the house?

Sometimes I can't help resenting the fact that he does not think highly of my mother. And I hurt for my mother.

I also wonder if Julian ever wonders about how I feel about certain things like, if this village is where I wanted to live for the rest of my life or if I do want to see the concert he's taking me to.

From the very first night:

"Let's take off your clothes now," he whispered while his hands were going all over me. He did not even ask whether I wanted to take my clothes off, if I did not feel uncomfortable going naked in front of him. Just "let's take off your clothes," period. I almost panicked. The last hold on my dignity had to come from me. "Can we turn off the light first?" I asked pleadingly. To which he replied with a short, emotionless, "oh".

He did not even ask if he had hurt me at all. When he was done, a little more caress on my hair and he was off, his breath turning to snore right on my ear, while I, demure and voiceless, did not dare speak my mind.

Not once did I find the courage to tell Julian about how I feel or more appropriately, how I do not feel, whenever he makes love to me. He never thought of asking me either, and I feel really bad about that.

Why do I follow him to the library in the middle of the night? Maybe I'm in the mood for making love?

Sometimes yes, I do want to make love. But more than the functional act of it, I long to experience the pleasure of making love.

But this is another thing most forbidden: for a woman to admit that she wants to make love, to initiate lovemaking, and to want to experience the pleasure of making love.

So is it me actually, because I cannot completely disengage myself from the taboos of sex and the attendant concept of propriety in women?

And so for the longest time, I simply waited for when Julian wanted it, when Julian thought of it. All the while convincing myself that there are things in this world more important than sex.

He is a good person, I keep reminding myself over and over. He has never laid a hand on me. And he loves me, even if it is not in him to show the kind of open affection that I see in some men. As though to his thinking, for a man to show affection to his wife is both corny and inappropriate, especially if done in front of other people.

And that makes me hold back my own desire to be affectionate to him especially outside our bedroom... to think that he is my husband and the father of my children!

Also because he is always busy. I am afraid that he would get annoyed should I take his mind off things, or else laugh at me and make a joke of my brazenness.

I want to stop being prim and proper, Julian... but I fear that you might suspect me of going crazy, and that would worry you no end.

I want to exchange stories with him, but I have no stories to tell except who among our neighbors are sleeping with whom, why the couple next door got into a fight, that one neighbor's house was being foreclosed because the husband defaulted on his payment and is buried deep in debt because of his addiction to gambling, etcetera... based on stories I have collected from the grapevine.

Julian hates those kinds of stories.

I started reading the papers to catch up on important issues, but I got confused because I have no background regarding the wars they mention in the world news for example, and Julian has no patience explaining them to me. Art, culture, business, world news... those are things I know nothing about. In fact, the one time I attempted to contribute in Julian's discussion with his friends, where the name Amado Hernandez was mentioned, I made the big mistake of saying that he was the author of the book "He Who Rides the Tiger". Julian's guests looked embarrassed, and Julian blushed and shot me a dagger look.

I wanted to hit myself on the head, not because I humiliated myself but because I humiliated Julian.

"Never butt in in conversations that you don't understand," he said to me later.

I want to communicate with him, but he has no interest in things that are of no use to him... like the fantasies and longings of his wife.

I want to try not bringing him his slippers and laying them right in front of his feet. I want to try telling him to make his own coffee. I even want to try telling him that, Julian, I want an annulment... I'm in love with someone else—just so he would be taken aback and notice me for once, even just for once. I want to find my own space in this big, big world. Maybe I could start with some question like:

"What if I go to work?" And already, my heart was pounding as I said it.

He did not even raise his eyes from the morning paper. "Sure, hon... go ahead."

My hope sparkled. "It's okay with you? You're allowing me to? I saw something in the papers, they need people in advertising. Your friend Daniel told me I could easily handle that. He said that all you need for the job is good public relations and enough ability to speak in English."

Julian finally reacted. "What? What kind of work are you talking about anyway?"

"Work. Outside the house. In an office." My excitement was quickly dissipating; my hope breaking apart. I saw in the way his forehead furrowed that I have angered him.

"And you've discussed that, with my friend Daniel?" I was right; he was instantly furious. "What do you mean, discussing that with Daniel? Why, what's he to you? Tell me, Amanda; is what I make not enough for you? Are there things you want that I can't give you?"

A lot of things, I was tempted to say. But this is not the time to be a smartmouth. "It's not simply a matter of money, Julian."

Julian rose in a sudden, violent manner. He pushed the chair so hard it grated the floor and tumbled. "You are not getting a job while I am alive, and that's that!"

Talk about male chauvinism!

Still, him being a male chauvinist was not the first thing that crossed my mind. I was actually afraid that he might hit me.

Scared to disrupt the quiet life of the Bartolomes, I muted my own voice and remained a woman born to simply bear children for her husband, to wait on her husband.

I made myself believe that I was happy. I would look at my reflection in the mirror and scold myself for being unhappy, tell myself that considering all that I have, no way to describe this feeling of unhappiness except sinful and whimsical. Within the standards of this materialistic society, I am by all means a lucky woman. I have everything that other women don't have... I should not hunger for anything more.

Chapter 3

SEPTEMBER, 1972

I clearly remember the time when it first dawned on me that my sons were fast growing up. The year was 1970, Jules' senior year in high school. I remember it clearly because that was the year the military captured Nilo Tayag, leader of The Kabataang Makabayan (Nationalist Youth), which greatly angered thousands of students and mobilized them into holding rallies and marches on the streets of the city, brandishing placards and slogans demanding his release. I had no idea then who Nilo Tayag was, and the circumstances related to his capture were things I could not care about. I had by then reverted to reading the society pages and articles for women, completely oblivious to the socio-political situation of the country. Kabataang Makabayan, Samahang Demokratiko ng Kabataan (Youth Democratic Alliance), and Makibaka (Fight!) were names that meant nothing to me. I could barely associate the so-called first quarter storm with the restless rustling of students in their campuses, and the deaths in Mendiola and the violent dispersal of the rallyists on Labor Day, much as they raised questions in my mind, were distant events that did not concern me and therefore were problems that I need not give much attention to.

I could see the screaming graffitis on almost every wall on my way to the supermarket. *Fight. Down with American*

Imperialism. Support Democratic Revolution. Cry of the Nation: Freedom! And I could only shake my head. The graffitis made the city look dirty, every wall soiled by the hands of restless youths who have nothing better to do. They, the youth of that era, were individuals who I decided were the extension of hippies and flower children of the previous decade; hippies and flower children who participated in sex orgies and pot sessions, sex revolution they called it, who, day and night, were trying to tell the world something in a language that no one in the older generation could understand. Then and now, the youth, I concluded, are rebels who are always seeking attention, and I blame this, first on negligent mothers in this age when a lot of women are breaking away from the demands of home to join the nation's labor force and make money they can be proud to say came from their own hard work; and second, on the volatile thoughts that are inherent to the youths as they grow up.

Push for National Democracy. Cry of the Nation: Revolution! These writings on the walls never failed to make me shake my head. Why were they inciting revolution? Didn't we already have democracy? What kind of democracy did they still want?

I could not understand what pushed them to march and hold rallies in front of Malacañang Palace and the US Embassy. I understood less the fact that their parents would not tell them off. All I understood was that it pained me also to hear about the young people injured or killed on the streets around the palace and outside the halls of Congress.

That was 1970. My sons have not yet completely weaned themselves away from their bikes and kites, harmonicas and ukuleles. I had no reason to worry that they might one day take part in these marches and demonstrations. Why should I worry anyway? They came from a good family... a good family produces only good and responsible people.

Even when the president suspended the writ of habeas corpus in mid-1971—yet another thing that made no sense to me—I kept on sleeping blanketed in contentment, even feeling smug sometimes.

Until Jules' birthday came.

"What do you want for your birthday, Jules?"

He said, "A guitar."

Okay, there is nothing wrong with a guitar. When Julian Sr. bought Julian Jr.'s first guitar, he also got him the two latest copies of the *Jingle Chordbook.*

At first, Jules was only into the current popular songs. You've Got A Friend. She Cried. But if I were observant enough, I would have noticed how the songs segued from the personal to ones that speak of a wider range of emotions: Strawberry Fields. Blowing in the Wind. Vincent. Songs of hope and hopelessness, but ones that go beyond the highs and lows of woman-man relationship.

He and his friend Willy, buddy and sometimes even more of a brother than Gani.

Songs that lament the cruelty of wars that claim the lives of even the young and the innocent. *Did you show her the pictures of the people you killed... not for God, but for country and war!* Around the same time that he started joining class boycotts and sit-ins against the tuition fee increase.

Later, he formally joined a group of students as the guitarist of its cultural arm, and soon he joined the jeepney drivers' strike against the latest oil price hike.

Time went on and Jules and Willy completely did away with the hit songs on the chartboard; they turned to songs overflowing with nationalism and sometimes, lyrics that openly express anger and revolt:

Rise up, oh Motherland,
Heed the call of the new revolution.
Embrace it, my Motherland,
The bright dawn of tomorrow!

Finally, Julian called my attention to it. "Are those the songs your son goes crazy over nowadays?"

"I don't know, I have no idea." I answered, trying to avoid the subject.

"You never told me anything."

"About what?"

It was also Julian who first told me that one must not sing those songs. "They are prohibited," he said.

"Oh?"

"Those songs incite rebellion. They are not allowed."

"I did not realize that. Go and tell your son."

"You go tell him."

"Why me? If he asked me why, I would not know how to explain it to him."

Julian took off his glasses, put down his book, and went outside to talk to Jules and Willy.

He yelled: "Jules!"

Jules' fingers stopped moving on the guitar strings. His and Willy's voices faded away along the lines, *"if this life of mine perishes, I bravely offer it"...*

"Don't you know that those songs are prohibited? People might hear you and think that you are activists!"

Jules scratched his head. He is still that kid who scratches his head when caught in the act. "Nothing to it, Dad."

Willy chimed in. "It's freedom of expression, sir."

"Well, of course!" Julian quickly replied. This is what I like about him; he can be very diplomatic. "But I don't want your names landing on the government's black list. You may not be aware of it, but they have been arresting activists left and right!"

"We're not doing anything wrong, Dad," Jules said.

"I'm just worried about you two. The city isn't safe anymore. There's not much to read in the papers nowadays except demonstrations, strikes, clashes between students and the Metrocom. Why are these things happening? I thought students are supposed to be spending their time on books, not placards!"

Jules and Willy secretly exchanged glances.

Julian continued when neither of the two replied. "I know I should give your demonstrations the benefit of the doubt, especially against tuition fee increase. But that's how it is... education costs a lot of money. When parents send their children to school, they should be prepared to spend money on them. Now, what's wrong is... if the child spends his school year doing leisurely things instead of studying and making every peso that we spend count. Don't you think so, Willy?"

I got it that Julian was also indirectly commenting on the amount of time Willy was spending in our house, leaving Jules very limited time on his studies.

But Julian asked Willy a question, and Willy gave Julian an answer. "Not all parents have the money to spend, sir. Many of them almost kill themselves working just so they could send us to school."

"Then that's all the more reason for you not to waste your time!"

Jules elbowed Willy; a silent way of telling him not to argue. But Willy spoke anyway. "Sir, Jules told me that you have freedom of expression in this house?"

I almost chuckled. By the way Jules elbowed Willy, looks like this so-called freedom of expression barely exists here.

Jules answered Willy's question. "When there's something that we don't like, we are free to say something about it."

Willy turned to Jules. "That's it! Then why aren't we allowed to have that freedom in school?" He then faced Julian again: "If we're discontented with how the school runs things... if we're discontented with this society for that matter... why shouldn't we speak about it?"

Julian laughed softly. "You know, son... among family members, issues are discussed calmly. In school, you're all screams, all bravado! Do you throw pill boxes at each other in your home? Of course not! What I am saying is, in our home for example, each person has the freedom to speak, but no one is allowed to be violent!"

Jules now addressed Julian. Calmly he said: "Out there, Dad, the school authorities do not listen to us. Instead, they call the Metrocom. It's always the Metrocom who creates all this mayhem."

"Jules, what I know of the Metrocom is that they are responsible people. But they are still human. Of course if you provoke them, they will act accordingly."

"They force us to shut down our activities and go home!"

"If it were me who chances upon a demo and see you there, I would demand that you come home as well."

"But I will explain myself to you, Dad. I'll make you understand."

The conversation above did not tackle yet serious issues of the country, issues that would soon give rise to intense and bloody wars between government and the people. Jules, at that time was still in his learning process, an attentive listener to the issues being taken up. The blossoming of ideologies in his innocent spirit could only be faintly glimpsed in the lyrics of his favorite songs:

How sweet it is to live
in your homeland,
If there are no slaves
and there is freedom.
Our oppressed nation,
Will rise in the breaking of dawn...

Still, this was when I felt the first stirring of concern, that soon, my son would no longer be just an ordinary student in campus. Little by little, he was beginning to become part of the greater and more troubled society, part of the new generation who will decide the fate of tomorrow: the eyes and ears and voices of our times.

Chapter 4

A WEEK BEFORE the declaration of martial law, mass arrest of student-leaders from different campuses took place. Although many of them were able to post bail and were released before the second suspension of the writ of habeas corpus, still many remained in jail. The military quickly went to work. Raids and zonings were carried out in many communities, and suspected criminals taking refuge in the hidden corners of the city were apprehended and put behind bars. The Chinese leader of a drug syndicate was sentenced to death by musketry, and the government closed down movie theaters that showed soft porn and clubs that staged half-nude women and live sex.

The offices of Free Press, Leader, Manila Times, and other "subversive" publications were also immediately shut down, their publishers and editors hauled in jail. Also hauled in jail were senators vocal against the ills and abuses of the Marcos government. Large businesses with unpaid bank loans and delinquent taxes were either seized or sequestered. The propaganda for Bagong Lipunan (New Society) was widely aired over the radio with its corresponding battlecry and the catchy slogan, *"for national progress, we need discipline!"* The ditty of the New Society was also ordered to follow the singing of the Philippine national anthem during flag ceremonies in schools and government offices, thus making it appear like a second national anthem.

Student councils and campus papers were abolished. Loose fire arms were ordered confiscated and the issuance of gun licenses to ordinary citizens was suspended. Gatherings of four or more people were banned, except for Pulung-pulong sa Kaunlaran (Gatherings for Progress), which was a government initiative. Sirens blew from different directions at the strike of midnight to signal the beginning of the curfew hours and people who remain on the streets were arrested.

Communities were divided into *barangays* where all residents were required to register. The land reform program was established, agencies dealing with problems like housing were set up. The Board of Censors was created to regulate the movies and the mass media. Decrees designating penalties for corruption in government, tax evasion, price manipulation, and other violations were passed.

If you take the news on its face value, that the government was finally able to eradicate the rotten system that the students fought against, along with its supposed efforts to raise the Philippine economy by improving local tourism and attracting foreign investments, if the news can be relied on, it would look like the impending revolution was averted with the advent of Ferdinand Marcos' New Society.

The students were intimidated into silence. Willy stopped showing up in our house—I had a feeling that he had gone into hiding. The streets became quiet with the silencing of those who used to roar fiercely and fearlessly burned the twin effigies of President Marcos and Uncle Sam. The red writings on the walls were wiped clean, strikes and mass actions were strictly banned, and in the absence of these kinds of activities, Jules spent a suitable amount of time on his studies.

He involved himself in youth-oriented activities and seemed to be putting some normalcy in his life that we calmed our fear that the PC-Metrocom might, some night, barge into our house to arrest him. We began to relax.

MARCH, 1973

I don't know whether in support of the spirit of conservation in response to the worldwide economic crisis, or a form of silent protest for what they consider the death of freedom with the reign of military rule, in '73, many schools decided not to hold commencement exercises for graduating students. Gani's school was among those that simply handed out diplomas inside classrooms instead of onstage, in a short, uneventful program that did not require formal attire and togas. It did not host a graduation party for the students, either.

Anyway, it was time to discuss with Gani his plans for college, the course he wanted to take, the university he wanted to enrol in.

"I'll just enroll in any degree program, Dad," Gani told Julian. "Anyway, I only need to complete eighteen units in college, then I'll apply for the US Navy."

Jules's reaction was lightning-fast. "The US Navy? Great! You want to be a slave to the Americans?"

Gani blew his top. "What slave are you talking about? You know what's wrong with you? You're too angry at the Americans! The opportunity is out there, you know? If you're an employee of the US Government, you get a fair salary! And you get a lot of benefits besides!"

"Alright, alright..." Julian stepped in before the argument became heated. "It's up to you, Gani. Your mom and I won't meddle with your decisions. Bring home a blue-blooded American girl, will you? It would be nice to have a white-skinned daughter-in-law!"

But just a few months later, late one night in mid-September, even before Gani was able to complete his first sem in college, he came home with a... *a girl!*

"It's late, Gani. What does this mean, you bringing home a girl?"

Gani scratched his head, answered sheepishly. "She can't go home now, Mom. It's almost curfew. We will get arrested by the metrocom."

"That's exactly the point! Why were you out this late?"

"We lost track of time. Is it okay if... she spends the night with us?"

I woke Julian up. Told him to get dressed. Fast. We are taking Evelyn back to her house.

Evelyn did not want to go. "My father's going to kill me!"

Gani did not want to take her home, either. "Her parents aren't like you, Dad... they are not... er, very nice people."

Julian reacted with a snort. "Why, thank you for the compliment, son... but Evelyn's still going home, and that's that!"

"But it's almost curfew!"

"We'll be with you."

Sirens blared as we drove towards Evelyn's house. Soon we were being chased by a metrocom car. Julian pulled over. Uniformed men checked the inside of our car, and when they did not find anything suspicious, they asked for our curfew pass.

"We don't have one, chief," Julian admitted sheepishly. "We're just taking my son's problem back to her house." He further explained the problem.

"Tsk, tsk...that is indeed a big problem," one of the metrocom men agreed. "All right, sir... drive safely!"

Evelyn's mother was still up when we reached their house, her face lined with anger and worry. She opened the door, let us in, and refused to take Evelyn back.

"My husband will not believe that nothing happened between those two. You said they got to your house a few minutes before twelve? Evelyn was out the whole day with him... she left this morning without even telling us where she'd go... that means they were alone until that time... and who knows what they've been doing!"

Of course she had reason to be suspicious. I made a mental note to make Julian talk to Gani when we got home.

"Ma'am," Julian gently told Evelyn's mother. "Can you just wake your husband up so he and I can talk about this?"

"He doesn't want to talk!"

"I'm sorry, Ma'am, but I don't think we can take your daughter back with us," Julian started to rise from his seat.

Gani and Evelyn objected simultaneously:

Gani: "No, Dad! Please!"

Evelyn: "Please take me with you!"

Evelyn's mother was adamant. "Look here, mister... we can't let your son get away with this. He has to marry my daughter!"

Julian looked aghast. I answered before he could:

"So, Ma'am, will you please just get your husband so we can hear what he has to say?"

And speaking of the devil, her husband came out just then: a fat man with a gloomy face, the kind of father who seems quick with the belt.

"Sir, here's your girl," Julian told him right away. "My son brought her home to us; we are bringing her back to you. Will you be willing to accept her, or would you also rather we take her back with us and marry them off at this young age?"

The husband was immediately indignant. "My daughter, marrying at this young age? Young lady, straight to your room!"

Problem solved!

But for all the troubles Julian and I went through, it did not turn out to be the end of it; we simply delayed the problem. Because, just a few weeks later, Gani and Evelyn did not come home.

That something bad might have happened to my son did not even cross my mind. I instinctively knew that he and Evelyn just eloped and that in a day or two, they would show up and tell us that they are getting married and... could we please give them our blessings?

I could not stop the anger and the tears. I was furious and I cursed and I wept. He's an idiot, I said to myself over and over. He was throwing away his future. I did not even consider that all the while I was feeling sorry about him "throwing away" his future, he could be happily planning that very same future, while in his arms lay the woman who, at that moment, he wanted to share his life with.

DECEMBER, 1973

But even before the wedding could take place, Gani and Evelyn were already often at odds with each other. I began to entertain the thought (not that I did not entertain it before) that maybe it would be best to call off the wedding, or at the very least, postpone it until such a time when they are better prepared emotionally.

"Sure as hell he can still back out of this wedding... when I'm already pregnant!" Evelyn snapped at me.

My heart skipped a beat. It would have been great to hear that news if only she did not announce it with such anger and bitterness.

I tried to maintain a blank expression. "How far along are you?"

"Four months, almost."

I did some quick arithmetic. "You mean to say, when you first went with Gani, you were already pregnant?"

"Didn't he tell you?"

"I did not ask."

"That's the very reason why we decided to elope. But if I only knew right away what it's like to live with him... I would have changed my mind!"

I felt an impulse to defend my son, to tell Evelyn that I've lived with Gani for nearly eighteen years now and in my opinion, he is not difficult to live with. But then of course, a mother-son relationship is very different from that of a couple's. If you think hard about it, there is more than one way a person relates with different people in his life, maybe because his emotional connection differs from person to person, in the same way different people connect with him differently.

I tried to convince myself that maybe, Evelyn's pregnancy had everything to do with their sudden inability to see eye to eye on certain things. That all those changes happening inside her body affect her disposition, make her irritable and demanding, but that this is only temporary. Some even say that men also undergo changes in their attitude when the woman is pregnant, that he absorbs some of her discomfort that makes him short-tempered. I can only hope that once the baby is born, their relationship will improve. I tried to make Gani see it this way, but he did not want to talk about it. I can see he prefers to keep the ups and downs of their relationship private.

Only three weeks to go before Christmas and my hands are full with so many things to do. Em is among a group of students invited to attend a leadership training seminar in

Baguio City sponsored by the Department of Education and Culture, part of the government's effort to promote its development programs. The date would coincide with Gani's wedding so he would have to give up one or the other, but I don't want him to miss that educational and fun trip. It is not his wedding, anyway.

Every time Gani and Evelyn's wedding gets mentioned, I am overwhelmed with sadness. I told Julian that maybe it would have been different if it were one's daughter who was to get married. That way, even if they backed out, no one would say that they have wronged anyone.

But in this case, if we backed out, we could even get sued.

Because that's the way society thinks. When pregnancy happens and no wedding takes place, the man is seen as the villain, the woman the victim. Nobody has ever thought that the man could also be the loser in this situation. Since he is not the one carrying the baby, it is not within his power to decide whether to give life to it or have it aborted. The woman has the final say because it is her pregnancy, it is her womb, it is her body. Pregnancy is a power that no man can ever take away from a woman.

So a woman is not completely powerless, after all? She is not subordinate to the man, she does have her own power against... *him*... especially if *him*, like Gani, is looking forward to being a father!

Why is it that this thought crossed my mind only now? I wish I had realized this long time ago... so I could have at least prided myself that in this world, me, too, is important in my own way.

Chapter 5

AS FAR AS Julian is concerned, there is no other recourse but for Gani to marry Evelyn. "He got himself into this, he has to take responsibility for it. *That* makes a man!"

"I thought that when you make decisions, it must be according to your conscience," I replied.

"What else is there to do? It is also your conscience that dictates your sense of responsibility,"

Evelyn's wedding gown is done, and so is Gani's formal suit. The gown of the maid of honor and Jules' suit as bestman are ready as well. We have finalized arrangements with the church and the hotel-restaurant where the wedding reception will be held. The invitations have been sent out. Still, I remain unsure whether it is really wise to get the kids married.

I secretly blamed myself for what Gani has gotten himself into. I should have done better as a mother. I talk to myself in English as it has long been my habit to talk to myself in English when I am alone. I should have talked to my children about the pitfalls of getting married at a young age. Even if they are boys, I should have been open to topics related to sex. So that they would have been forewarned about the possible consequences of their actions.

But that is exactly the problem: my children are all boys. Maybe it would have been easier if they had been girls. Maybe then I would have been more open discussing sex with them.

Or would I?

I was knee-deep in the things I have to do: last-minute preparations for the wedding, Em's trip to Baguio, and Christmas, which of course no one can ever postpone. Mostly preoccupied with trying to keep peace between Gani and Evelyn, I have barely paid attention to my other children. Nothing to worry about them, anyway. Jason comes home late sometimes, but he only goes around the subdivision on his bike, which he has been doing ever since. He does not get into trouble and yes, accidents do happen but not on our streets where very few cars come and go, and only on peak hours.

What about Bingo? There he is, flying his kite on Grandma Asyang's roof again. Tsk tsk. That is the problem with this one... how many times do I have to tell him to keep away from the neighbors' roofs!...

"Bingo!"

"Coming, Mommy!"

Bingo tags at the string of his kite. The kite is not a colored triangular piece of *papel de hapon* (traditional japanese paper) glued to sticks and has a tail but a square piece of what looks like a newspaper page simply folded on both sides. My poor son, what a shabby kite he has! I made a mental note to buy him a bunch of kites next time I go to the supermarket. Or maybe obligate Jules to make him a better one.

Jules used to be so patient with Bingo but lately, he seems to always have something important to do. He's out of the house most of the time and when he's home, he locks himself in his room. When Bingo follows him around, he would always say, wait. We can do stuff together later. I have tons of homework to do.

Maybe Jules is burdened with too much schoolwork, more than he could handle? I told him not to take a full load this semester...

The kite sways in the air, dives and gets tangled on a tv antenna. Bingo pulls the string to free the kite but the string snaps, the kite floats in the wind and lands a few steps away from me.

I went to retrieve the kite which is already torn in the middle. The heading on the newprint screams before my eyes: *"Ang Bayan"* ("The Nation")!

The Nation. My heart skipped a beat. I knew right away that this is one underground paper. I picked it up. Oh yes, there it is, underneath the heading: *Official paper of the Communist Party of the Philippines*. The beating of my heart turned to chill running down my spine. Whose is this? Where did Bingo get this?

Bingo has already gone down from Grandma Asyang's roof.

"You can throw it away, Mom!" he yelled. "It's torn!" Wrapping the string around an empty milk can, he started heading home.

"Bingo!"

Bingo stopped in his track. I half-run towards him.

"Where did you get this? Whose paper is this?"

Which confused him. "Why?"

"Don't ask. Where did you get this?"

"In our house."

"Where exactly in our house?"

"In *Kuya* Jules' room."

But I already knew it even before I asked, that this kind of reading material could not come from anyone else but Jules!

I felt a slow boiling of both fear and anger.

I RUMMAGED through the drawers of Jules' table and found the other pages of the newsletter. They are spread before me now. Page 2 on the left corner of the 6-page mimeographed newletter stapled together.

I flipped open the other papers. Liberation. Photocopies of a few pages of the Southeast Asian Chronicle. A loose page of Newsweek Magazine. All containing articles that by the titles alone, one will know that they are articles openly opposing martial law, criticizing some officials of the Philippine government, discussing the need for a national democratic movement.

What does this mean, Jules being in possession of these subversive materials? Come on, Amanda; I scold myself. Don't overreact; there's absolutely nothing wrong here. Newsweek, that is a magazine openly sold downtown. Southeast Asian Chronicle, that surely cannot get into the country without clearance from the government.

But... *The Nation*? I don't think I can believe this is legal.

Who knows, maybe the government is now allowing this to belie the accusation that there is suppression of press freedom in the country?

Don't be stupid. You know very well that Jules would not be in possession of these by accident!

I am really feeling anxious. Jules might be up to something again.

I need to talk to him.

But would he listen to me?

His father should be the one to talk to him.

But I feel that Julian is no longer amenable to the idea of discussing political issues with Jules; not because he is no longer interested in the country's political landscape or that he considers it a useless topic, but because they do not see eye to eye on this issue, and I think that is beginning to get to him.

I could recall this scene from one night some time ago. Jules said that we are simply the bin America throws their trash into and Julian replied that America helps us in many ways.

"They send us financial aid; aren't you happy with that?" Julian asked. "They are the investors who help with the industrialization of this country; who constructed our roads and bridges, schools and buildings. They are the ones who bring cars to us."

"Dad, we pay for those cars... they are not given to us for free!" Jules answered. "With cars naturally come the need for roads and bridges, the materials for which they sell to us. Cars run on gasoline that we buy from them, tires and spare parts that we buy from them, too. They built us schools and dumped their books on us which successfully colonized our brains and conditioned us to be wistful of the American way of life... to crave for their products that can now easily be transported through the vehicles and roads and bridges that they built and we paid for. And this in effect is killing our own industries! Can't you see, Dad, the US is bleeding our country dry!"

I think Julian could see Jules had a point there, but he had his own opinion as well, and said that it has been that way for a long long time, and that all those rallies and chaos cannot change that.

"Okay," he said in the end. "All right, let's say that America is indeed that evil. We don't owe them a single thing. Okay. But how come it is our government that you young people are rebelling against with such ferocity? Is that fair?"

"Because it is with the connivance of our government that this imperialist country goes on and on abusing our nation. These government officials rake in a lot of money from that, too."

"Marcos is not yet the sitting president when the treaties on Philippine-American relations were signed. He is duty-bound to recognize those treaties."

"And continue to connive with the American government, Dad?"

"Now, Jules... people in government are not stupid. They are expert economists, political scientists..."

"Experts on graft and corruption as well."

From then on, I noticed that Julian avoided engaging in discussion with Jules. Other than it being pointless from his point of view, his knowledge of governments and international relations are based mainly on mainstream media, so far removed from the prowess and expertise he possesses related to computers, infrastructures, and everything else along the

line of engineering. Maybe it is not easy on his pride that he seems to be losing every argument with his son, or maybe he is afraid that their relationship would in the end be compromised. But more than this, maybe he is in denial regarding the direction Jules is taking, afraid to face the possibility that sooner or later, his son would completely go against the tide. He is losing his hold on him. The son has become his own man and that is something beyond the control of a father.

Whatever. Julian still needs to talk to his son. And so I told him about the reading materials I found in Jules' bedroom.

But all Julian said was, "That son of yours sure is a naughty one."

"Is that all you're going to say? That my son is naughty?"

Julian took a deep breath. "Your son is simply reading; what's wrong with that? The kid is a student, he wants to learn. But so far, the students are no longer making any trouble, are they? The rallies have stopped. I will speak to your son when I have something to say to him."

"But Julian..."

"Amanda, if you don't mind... I've got work to do."

Meaning, our conversation is over.

But I cannot shake away my uneasiness. I decided that at least one parent has to have a word with Jules... even if I have to be that parent!

But I need to know exactly what I would say to him. First, I need to be one hundred percent sure that these reading materials are indeed subversive.

I need to reflect on these first.

"It is not the members of the oil producing and exporting countries that dictate the unreasonable increase in the price of oil, but the oil companies mostly owned by the United States."

My forehead furrows. Wait, what is so subversive about this?

"If a barrel of oil cost ten dollars before 1973, $1 went to the country exporting the oil while the remaining $9 was divided between the oil company and the respective governments of the trading countries."

Slowly, I stopped wondering about the alleged subversiveness of these materials but rather, started wondering whether what the articles are saying are indeed the true state of things.

Title: *"Are Oil Companies Really Losing Profit?"*

**Exxon is the leading industrial empire in the United States.*

**Oil companies lead the top 500 companies in the United States.*

**According to Fortune Magazine, since 1955, Exxon, Gulf Oil, and Mobil are consistently the top 10 earners in the list of multinational corporations.*

The combined profit of oil companies owned by the Americans run to one billion dollars a year?

The following is a partial list of the big industries in the Philippines that have foreign capital (from a different newsletter):

San Miguel Corp – Major Investors: Sorianos, USA

Pepsi-Cola – Pepsi Cola International, USA

Carnation, Phil – Carnation, USA

Kraft Foods, Inc. – Kraft, USA

Purefoods Corp – Hormel International, USA

These are only some of them. The list goes on and on.

"They bring into the country a small capital and borrow billions of pesos from Philippine banks to establish their business in the country. It is also here where they sell their products, but the hundreds and hundreds of millions of pesos that their companies earn, they bring back to their home countries."

I ponder over this. This does not seem right. They would borrow money from us, make profit off us, and then they would bring all the profits to their own country? We would indeed go bankrupt in this scheme of things.

Or maybe this is exactly what the activists are saying about America robbing the Filipino people of livelihood and keeping them mired in poverty?

There is nothing subversive about this. Why would the truth ever be subversive?

In any case, the rest of the articles mention words like one-man rule, puppet government, and dictatorship. Words like NPA (New People's Army) and revolution. The country being under martial law, one can be arrested just for being in possession of these reading materials!

LATE INTO THE night, I was still in the living room, in the spot barely touched by the glow of light in the dining room, waiting for Jules to come home. It was not for whatever dramatic effect that I turned off the light in the living room. It was just that the glare hurts my eyes as I lay down waiting.

From their bedroom, I could make out Gani and Evelyn's voices. Although the sounds are faint, it is easy to conclude that they are fighting yet again, the angry tone of their voices interspersed with the sound of things being dropped with a bit of force.

I can hear laughter coming from the backyard where Jason and Julian are engaged in light banter, completely oblivious to the faint but angry voices upstairs. Among our children Julian is most fond of Jason. I don't remember him ever getting angry with this young man. I'm not sure if this is because Jason looks like him the most, or because Jason jokes and fools around a lot and, as Jason himself puts it, has the most winning personality. Julian is lenient with Jason when it comes to money, to his studies, to coming home late, even when he is serious and Jason would not take him seriously. It is a good thing the others take it in stride and have not shown any feeling of resentment.

A while ago, Julian finally remembered to check on me:

"What are you still doing here?"

I told him. "I'm waiting for Jules."

"He'll be home soon."

"I'm having a word with him."

Julian just shrugged and left.

I heard the click in the keyhole. The door opens carefully.

"Is that you, Jules?"

A soft reply, almost like he does not want me to hear: "Bingo, Mom."

I almost jumped out of the divan. "Bingo, what are you still doing outside?"

"I'm inside now, Mom."

"Upstairs to your room! Now! And you even brought a key!"

Bingo hurriedly went up the stairs.

The clock's pendulum strikes. Eleven times. It's 11 p.m. Goodness, it will be curfew hour in just a short while. This boy Jules might not come home again!

He has done this many times before, not coming home. He would simply call. "Mom, I might not make it before curfew. I'll be spending the night here at Danny's." Or Luis'. Sometimes, Tasyo's.

I know these boys and I trust them, I never asked Jules about what they could be so engrossed in. And then, it suddenly dawned on me that he has never said that he would be spending the night at Willy's house. Willy is his best best friend. Did he and Willy have a falling out?

The keyhole clicks. The door opens once more.

"Jules?"

Response: "Mom?"

I was finally able to breathe easily. "It's late."

He did not respond anymore. He did not even turn the light on. I find it strange that he did not even bother to turn on the light. He went straight up the stairs. He was out of my sight even before I could ask if he already had dinner.

He did not even greet me with any word other than "mom".

I followed him to his room. No, I was not going to start my talk with him just yet. I was just going to ask if he has had his dinner. I would set the table for him, sit across from him while he eats. I would talk to him about other things first.

I knocked on his door. I turned the knob open.

"Jules?"

He was sitting on the side of his bed, his face buried in his hands. His shoulders hunched, he looks forlorn. Beside him is a rolled-up copy of some tabloid.

He's exhausted, I decided. He might not be in the mood to talk. Maybe I should leave him alone for now.

I reached for the tabloid, spread it open. This is not a Manila newspaper but a local paper of some far-off community. Headline: NPA MEMBER KILLED IN ENCOUNTER WITH GOVERNMENT SOLDIERS

I turned my eyes to Jules. "What's wrong, Jules? Are you not feeling well?"

He begins to sob.

I put down the tabloid altogether. I am immediately alarmed. I touch my son's head. "Jules?"

He finally lifts his head. Pain is etched deeply on the innocent face of my Jules.

"Why?" I asked. I can feel the fear growing inside me. "What happened?"

He shakes his head, looks like he would refuse to say anything. He bites his lip hard to stifle another sob. But the trace of anguish on his face can not lie. His lips twitch, trembling, and in a quivering voice, he tells me:

"They... they killed Willy. Mom... Willy's dead!" and he bursts into tears. Howling. Heartbreaking. Just like a child.

It gives me the chills. Who are they he is referring to? What happened? I held Jules in my arms. Willy is dead, he said. Willy... who I suddenly thought of just a while ago... the friend who is more like a brother to him than Gani... *killed???*

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*note: *Kuya* is a title of respect to older brothers

Chapter 6

I AM SO PRESSED for time; there simply are too many things to do. Em has to be on his way early enough; I have to check if he had packed enough clothes, his jacket, toothbrush, insect repellant, even snacks he can share with his friends along the way.

I have to order the flowers for the wedding, call the manager of the restaurant we reserved for last-minute suggestions, do a little shopping for Bingo and Jason's school Christmas party...

Can I do all that in one day?

My eldest is still in bed. He has been up half the remaining hours of the night, unable to rest, had been going up and down the stairs. I could hear the faint footsteps outside our bedroom. I followed him in the middle of the night and found him slouched on the sofa, led him back to his room, tucked him in bed like I did when he was a little boy. "Try to sleep," I whispered. And turned off the light.

I could hardly believe that Willy was the NPA member referred to in the headline of the tabloid passed from one hand to another until it finally reached Jules. He was supposedly killed in an encounter with military soldiers. Could one find a bit of consolation in the fact that at least, Willy was killed fighting, unlike those who were killed in their most vulnerable circumstance, abducted, tortured and murdered with absolutely nothing to defend themselves with? And in a way, can it be said that he was luckier?

It is so hard to imagine that armed encounters are taking place in some parts of my country.

Up until now, I do not know how best I can comfort my son. I keep searching for the right words to let him know that I share his grief. Go with him to his best friend's wake I must. I cannot let him go alone; there could be some military elements doing surveillance, most probably in plain clothes so they cannot easily be detected. It is best that I am with my son just in case, God forbid, they recognize him from pre-martial law photographs. Photos of rallies were splashed all over the papers at that time. I don't know how I will be able to protect my son, but I know I will... even if it costs me my life!

WILLY'S PARENTS travelled to that faraway province where the encounter supposedly happened. They were questioned, given a hard time, but in the end allowed to bring home the body of their son.

On our way to Willy's house, a military vehicle filled with uniformed men stopped on the right side of our car when the traffic light turned red. I glanced at them, and I could see how young their faces are beneath the helmets that cover their heads. Young faces trying hard to project a mask of sternness and determination, each one holding a rifle—hands that may have

none or very little experience at firing guns. Could their hands be showing signs of nervousness? Are they ready for battle, or do they actually dread the idea of being faced with a situation where the only option is to pull the trigger?

I did not feel threatened at all that they might suddenly realize they are just one vehicle away from an "enemy". I cannot picture them as the kind of people who can kill without fear or hesitation.

But on the other hand, it was also farthest from my mind that Willy could be so unafraid as to exchange gunfire with the likes of these young soldiers. I wonder if it could have been someone as young as they are who fired that fatal shot that killed Willy? I wonder how they feel right now, those kids who killed Willy?

"Why, Dad... are the PC (Philippine Constabulary) bad people?" Bingo's innocent question still echoes in my mind, after the whole family heard about Willy's death.

Julian answered carefully. "Using the word bad, that depends on the personal conviction of each person. Both sides are fighting for their respective ideals, you know. Otherwise, they will not ally with that side."

"But they killed Willy!"

"It could be that Willy has killed someone from their side as well. When a soldier - or an NPA member for that matter, is caught in the middle of a battle, he has no choice but to kill... or be killed."

Now I want to shed tears for these young people. For those boys in uniform. For Willy. For Jules.

ONLY A HANDFUL of people are in attendance at Willy's wake. The military is on the lookout, I heard; and friends must be wary of coming over, although I did not see any military-looking person anywhere near the house of the Cruzaldos. But Jules said on occasions like this, they send out agents no one can easily recognize.

We arrived to the voices of young activists, singing the same songs Jules and Willy used to sing:

He sacrificed,
his one precious life,
For the welfare
of the oppressed...

They sang in low, mournful voices, cautious not to be heard outside, they who dared come to the wake.

Jules introduced me to Willy's mother. I grasped her hand; instinctively put my arm around her and held her tight. God, I felt so at one with her! Being a mother sure is not easy. It is only fun and simple when your children are just learning to walk, when the only time they could hurt you is when they accidentally step on your toe as they keep following you around, and you lose your balance in your attempt to avoid bumping them and causing them to fall over. But wait till the day they become taller than you are, the day when they decide to embrace their own ideals, live their own lives, and they venture into some unfamiliar territory where danger lurks everywhere. Then pain and helplessness build inside your heart. As you organize the wedding that he is unprepared for but that backing out is not an option. As shots are being fired in front of Congress where he is part of the ongoing rally. When you come face to face with the news that he is fatally wounded in a struggle. When you are finally given the sealed coffin of the child who came from your own womb, the child you cherished and protected and brought up to be the best of what he could be.

He learned to rise above,
His weaknesses and sufferings.
Be it in the field of battle
or in the hands of the enemy ,
He valiantly stood his ground.

"I still can't believe this!" wails Willy's mother, voicing out the same question I have asked myself a thousand times. "Why? Why?"

Children, why? I am on the verge of badgering even these young people singing behind me. What made you become this way!

"DID WILLY know what he got himself into?" I posed the question to Jules that night when we were finally alone in his room. "How about you, do you realize what you're doing? Do you understand what you're doing?"

"It's the call of the times," was Jules' short reply.

"Call of the times what? Why?"

"It's time for people to choose whose side they're on."

"I don't understand what you're saying!"

"Are you going to help change the state of things... or will you choose to serve the class of the oppressors?"

My eyes lingered on his face. For a moment there, I felt some unfamiliarity with his young face that does not seem so young anymore. Is this really my boy Jules? It seems that he has changed dramatically from the boy who, not too long ago, was complaining about Mary Ann Adriatico following him around, and pleading with me not to even entertain the idea of asking him to take the girl as his partner to the school's acquaintance party.

"... They who make slaves out of the laborers," Jules went on saying, "... enslave the farmers who are almost bound to the earth they plow, and yet whose children go to bed hungry, because their harvest is being taken away from them. To all who are forever victims of oppression."

I started to answer but he went on and on.

"... victims of capitalism. Of the feudal order. Of imperialism."

But we are not laborers here, Jules! my mind screamed. We are not simply farmers!

"Freedom... isn't that the most important thing of all?"

"But we are free, Jules!"

"That is not true!"

"And what is true?"

"As long as the majority of the Filipino people are abused and bound in poverty, we are not truly free," Jules answered slowly and emphatically.

The conviction in his voice and the determination in his eyes made me lose my voice. Tomorrow, two-three days from now, are you also going to join the armed struggle, Jules? Will the government brand you as an NPA member, too?

The possibility chilled me to the bone and made it most difficult for me to sleep.

I woke Julian up in the deep of the night.

"Why?" he asked. He took a deep breath in an attempt to hide his annoyance. "Amanda, it's two in the morning. What's so important an issue that your son and I need to talk about?"

"The things that he is infatuated with. Banned reading materials in his possession."

"Bold magazines?"

I exploded. "Are you blind? Asleep? Deaf? It's martial law, Julian! People need to be careful with their every move and their every word... even with the things they read!"

"As long as he makes sure he doesn't get caught."

"Right! Make a joke of it! These things your sons are getting themselves into, don't they mean anything to you at all? Gani's getting married... do you even care? Your son's best friend was killed... and Jules is doing exactly the same things he did! But you can still sleep soundly. They are your children... do these things mean nothing to you at all?"

At last I made an impression on him; I could see it on the sudden trace of astonishment on his face.

Who won't be surprised that I was actually talking to him this way? I have always been soft-voiced and reserved and never an argumentative wife. I never pestered him before.

Julian looked too stunned to say anything.

What he did not know was, I was as stunned as he was!

Chapter 7

WE GLARED AT each other, Julian and I. There was anger peering through his eyes, there was anger in mine as well. I have raised my voice at him and that is something new. I did not mean to explode but no way am I going to apologize.

Why should I apologize? I am fed up with having to bear all of our problems alone, doing all the works and taking care of this family!

I am finally starting to see why, out of the blue, certain thoughts pop up in my mind, like thinking of giving birth as a power that only women possess. Because I have to retrieve my self-worth while trying to silence my restlessness over the scheme of things, and keep in check my feeling of abandonment while Julian snores contentedly beside me in bed.

Julian angrily rose to a sitting position. "What do you want me to do with your son? Make him kneel with his arms stretched out? Tie him up? Beat him with my belt?"

"I said talk to him!" was my piercing reply.

"And what will I tell him, for God's sake!"

"Why ask me? He is your son!"

"I have to think first about what I should tell him!" With that, he angrily got off the bed towards the door but turned and faced me again, pointing a finger at me: "And don't you take that tone of voice, Amanda, when you're talking to me! Don't you ever forget that I am still the man around here!" With that, he stormed out the room, slamming the door behind him.

I shivered. Not because he slammed the door but because his words and the way he delivered them emphasized firmly that being the man made him the king of the house. And that as the woman, I should remain obedient and subservient to him.

I felt rebellion rising inside me. How dare him bring me down to the level of an underling!

Yet no matter how offended I felt, that is exactly the state of our relationship. I am simply his coffee maker. I am simply his masseuse when his back hurts. His live-in maid.

And this made me all the more angry and restless. The issue concerning the unjust relationship between men and women added tremendous pressure on my mind.

For the first time in our twenty years of marriage, I almost regretted that all I have ever been is just wife and mother.

GANI AND Evelyn's wedding was uneventful, no different from all other weddings where the bride is dressed in white and walks to the altar with her father who gives her hand to the waiting groom, in some ritual that to me is symbolical of father surrendering the daughter to another man, transferring to that other man full custody of his daughter, all the obligations and privileges to her that he used to enjoy. Never mind that Evelyn's father would not shed away that gloomy look on his face—what do I care about his face anyway— maybe to show to all and sundry that he cannot forgive my son for "stealing" his daughter who is "still a baby". He "surrendered" Evelyn to Gani just the same, being true to the role of a father in this "holy" sacrament.

The photographer tried to follow every move of the main characters in the ceremony, his camera flashing every step of the way. Pictures for albums. For souvenirs. In such an occasion that I don't see why has to be given utmost importance and memorability, regardless of the feelings of the people involved.

Too bad photography cannot capture pictures of deeply hidden thoughts and emotions, if only so that when a person faces the final Court of Life, he has proofs to show his happiness... or lack of it.

"So young!" I could hear people talking in hushed voices. So young, they told each other; in tones I could not discern whether of admiration or disdain.

I heard other whispered comments: "Her belly is already showing!", and I almost chuckled as I remember that this is the very thing Evelyn's mother is feeling so resentful about, that when her daughter got married, *"her belly is already showing"*.

Em came home from Baguio two days later. Julian and I fetched him at the bus terminal. After a few days of giving each other the cold shoulder, Julian was starting to speak to me a little, although it is apparent that he is still nursing his bruised ego. I am speaking to him as well, but deliberately keeping my tone of voice unfriendly so he will know that I am still not sorry.

On the ride home, Em regaled us with stories about the people he met and became friends with, from how they raced up the stairs to the grotto to how they spent early evenings at Burnham Park, segueing to the discourse of the guest speakers and school representatives on the state of campuses all over the country; the government's efforts on various reforms: land areas for farming, funding of electrification programs extending to the most remote barrios, health and nutrition campaigns, small-scale industries, foreign investments...

"On the whole, it was like an information campaign, Dad," Em said.

"Yes, good!" Julian quickly agreed. "That's definitely necessary, so you become aware of what the government is doing. So you won't be screaming your lungs out on the streets!"

You see? I thought to myself. We're on the same side of the fence, after all.

"But the topic that was debated lengthily, Dad... was the shutting down of student publications," Em added.

"Because writers abused the freedom of the press," was Julian's quick response. "Even campus papers were used to turn the people against the government. If the government did not declare martial law, rebellion would most probably continue to erupt all over the country. True, under martial law, things have become a bit abnormal. Schools without student councils, without campus papers, that is a bit abnormal. Limiting freedom of the press is abnormal. But the government needs to do it. At least while the government is making reforms. To avoid criticism and denunciations. Because these will hinder the complete implementation of reforms. At this stage, Em... the whole nation needs unity."

Em beamed at his father "You seem to know all the answers, Dad."

Flattered by his son's remark, Julian laughed heartily.

Unable to contain myself anymore, I said, in a voice no longer unfriendly: "You see, you do have something to say to Jules, after all."

In that instant, the light turned red. Julian stopped the car. He turned to me: doubtful at first, convinced in the end... that I was finally breaking the ice between us.

He smiled his friendliest smile ever. I could not help smiling back. It warms me that we are again on speaking terms.

Em continued talking about the seminar over lunch. Julian, Gani, and Em are of the same mind about the merits of the government's efforts to implement reforms. Jason and Bingo contribute their knowledge on the subject as well, based on what they are being taught in school. Jules is the only one who remained quiet all throughout. Maybe because no one is giving him so much of a glance, no one is asking his opinion, as if his thoughts do not matter. And me? I know that at the very least, Julian and I are saying a lot of things that we want Jules to seriously think about, things justifying the government side without addressing him directly because we don't want him to argue with us. I could sense Julian's uncertainty in spite of all his bravado, fear even, that Jules might finally speak his mind and contradict his views and that he might fail to defend his stand. I keep giving Jules secret glances, warning him with my eyes not to say anything that will spoil the family's bonding time and confuse his younger brothers.

Finally, seems that Jules can no longer endure both the reactionary flow of conversation and the feeling of being left out. He rises and carefully, quietly steals out of the room.

I feel pity for my son.

Julian feels something, too. A veil of sadness settles on his face.

The kids fall silent. They too, are affected.

"Em?" Julian says after a long while.

"Yes, Dad?"

"And you, too, Gani... Jason..."

A playful response from Jason. "Present, sir!"

"None of you are going to join any discussion involving politics outside our family, okay?"

"Why?"

"You're just kids. What you believe right now... five-ten years from now might not be the same anymore. For now, enjoy your childhood. Basketball, bikes... focus on those things first. You get to be kids only once in your lives, you might regret it if you miss out on the joys of youth."

"Like me," Gani interjects, not exactly in a joking manner.

"Shut up, Gani. You understand, kids? I don't want political issues to prejudice your studies... or compromise your relationships as brothers."

It takes long before anyone says anything.

Em: "Well, Dad... so far we're towing the line."

At that moment, I again sensed in Julian the nudging fear that sooner or later, Jules will become more determined to live the principle he has started to embrace.

In the days that followed, I saw Julian's continued uneasiness toward his son, gradually creating a distance between them. It scares me to see them falling farther and farther away from each other.

FIRST week of May, '74

I chanced upon Jules packing a bagful of clothes. I was immediately alarmed.

"Where to?" I asked.

A short response. "Vacation."

"Where?"

"Bicol."

"What are you going to do in Bicol? We don't know anyone there."

"I know someone there, Mom... a friend."

"Who? How and where did you know him?"

"Come on, Mom, you're beginning to sound like the military. I'm not a child anymore, okay? I know what I'm doing."

"What are you going to do in Bicol?"

"Do I need to tell you in details every single thing that I do?"

"I said what are you going to do in Bicol?!!!"

Jules stared at me, then suddenly flared up, matching the angry tone of my voice. "You've been so short-tempered lately. If you want to see, step by step, what I'm going to do... you'd better come with me. Who knows, the exposure might even help raise your consciousness!"

Before I could stop myself, I have instinctively raised my hand which landed smack on his cheek, so forcefully he reeled from the impact.

Chapter 8

THE PALM OF MY hand left a red mark on Jules's face. I have never laid a hand on him in his entire life, and what I just did left both of us dumbfounded.

Well, it's about time! I thought angrily. That's the very thing lacking from me as a mother, a forceful hand. That's the very thing lacking from Julian and me. That's why these young men take us for granted. We should have taught them more respect and discipline. Made it clear to them that they too have responsibility to us.

I half-expected Jules to react as vehemently from what I did. But instead, after a moment of stunned silence, his eyes reddened. My heart softened. My son still cries easily, I thought. I have hurt him, emotionally more than physically.

"Sorry, Mom," he mumbled. Then he turned his back and left the room. Quietly, carefully closing the door behind him, so unlike many other young people who would slam the door on their parents.

It breaks my heart to stare at the closed door and see it metaphorically as a wall that suddenly came between us.

Jules was nowhere in the house when we woke up the next morning. I subconsciously expected it so I was not at all surprised. I did not cry. He must be on his way to Bicol by now.

It looked more like we were in front of a grave instead of the breakfast table, each one of us concentrating intently on our food, the silence broken only by the soft murmur of one asking another to please pass the dish.

It was Em who finally broke the silence concerning Jules. He did appear like he wanted to say something a long while ago.

"I know *Kuya* Jules also feels guilty having to leave without so much as a goodbye," he said.

Just that, and Julian hit the ceiling. "He feels guilty, hah! Why would you do something that will make you feel guilty anyway? I don't think that's honest, do you? Whatever a person does, he must do according to the dictate of his conscience!"

"Or according to his sense of responsibility," Gani added with a tone of derision.

He's directing innuendos at Evelyn again, I thought. I stared him down.

Maybe it's time I talked to these two. I'm fed up with them. I'm going to tell them to better get an annulment.

But at this point in time, when Evelyn will give birth any day soon?

Julian is still at it, furiously criticizing what Jules did: "He could have bid us goodbye at the very least. Not act as though we don't even exist! A family has the right to at least know when one member is taking off, right? Or maybe this family is just really becoming uncivilized?"

"But, Dad... he told Mom he was leaving!"

I quickly defended myself. "That much, you already know, Julian. I already told you about what happened last night."

Julian took a deep breath and toned down his voice. "All right, what's done is done. It has already happened. In case you want to blame your mom, Em... don't."

"I am not blaming Mom," Em replied defensively. "Besides, *Kuya* Jules said it was his fault."

Julian's eyes narrowed. "He told you? Your brother talked to you?"

"He had no one else to talk to."

Julian's voice rose one decibel again. "What does it mean—"

"He said he has been very disrespectful to Mom. But it was only because he was under pressure."

I felt anxious. "What do you mean, under pressure?"

"Not from other people. From himself. He calls it internal struggle. He feels afraid going there, too. But he said it's something he has to do."

"But going where?"

"There. I don't know where exactly. But *out there* in the countryside. Where the resistance is strongest. He said he's going on an exposure trip."

Going on an exposure trip, to a place where resistance is strongest. Is it a place where encounters are most possible to happen? God, I cannot understand this, but is it a place similar to where Willy went... and cost him his life?

But even as I was feeling the impact of what I heard, how it also affected Julian did not escape me. His hand trembled as he reached for the glass of water, the water spilling on the side of his mouth, down to his neck and on his shirt. The water came from the fridge but he did not seem to feel the iciness on his skin.

I rose slowly and as carefully as I could, as though I could make it outside the dining room unnoticed. Upstairs. I entered Jules' room and quietly put things in order, picking up the blanket he did not even bother to fold, pillows thrown every which way. A pair of leather shoes and socks balled up inside them. A t-shirt on the floor, a towel on the back of a chair. Yesterday's issue of The Bulletin. A crumpled pack of cigarettes. An ash tray filled to the brim.

As though he was so pressed for time he could not wait to get out of the house!

He felt afraid going there, but it was something he had to do. Is it possible that in his moments of indecision, he also wanted to ask me, "Mom, shall I go?" Is it possible that he wanted to tell me, "Mom, I'm scared but this is something I must do."

I covered my mouth with my palm, the same palm that left a red mark on Jules' cheek last night. I feel tortured. My God, how could I have hurt my son?

I sat down on the side of his bed and wept. I bit my lip hard to cushion the sound of weeping. Hey, stop crying! This is just the beginning, and you're already crying?

It is only the beginning and my heart is already breaking!

IT IS IMPOSSIBLE for me not to think of Willy as well. Willy, who, lifeless in his coffin, had pain still written all over his face, the face that used to be so young and so pleasant to look at. We found out later that actually, Willy was not instantly killed in the encounter but was captured alive and made to suffer for a long time. The military tortured him to death, repeatedly pounding the haft of a rifle right on his open gunshot wound. I wonder if throughout his agony, he did not repeatedly call for his mother, did not desperately beg for her to come get him; he who was only eighteen years old and according to his mother, was still a young boy at heart, one who would look for her *everywhere* if he came home from school and she happened to be out of the house.

"He would be looking for me in the neighbors' house, asking everyone where I could be," Willy's mother told me. "I often scolded him for that, told him that he's too old to be looking for me all the time!"

My lips curled into a bitter smile. It is ironic how a mother wants her child to stop looking for her but wants him to remain within her sight. A mother's child is a mother's child no matter how "old" he has become.

I can recall the last time Willy's name got mentioned in one of my conversations—or arguments—with Jules. It was about the US military bases in the Philippines. About the weapons the United States sends us.

I argued that it was for our benefit, so we will have weapons to defend our country in case of war, especially because there is always the danger of us being invaded, by Russia for example.

I said to Jules, "We need those weapons."

His response was a terribly angry one. "What for? To use against people like Willy?"

I did not immediately see the connection between Willy and the US military arms.

Jules sneered. "They send aids to their allies... to use against the forces challenging their imperialism. They are simply helping our government protect their vested interests in this country. And so we fight among ourselves... Filipinos against fellow Filipinos!"

I can only shake my head with the memory of how furious he was.

The hours ticked away. Evening fell, and I remained by the window, hoping against hope that I would see Jules coming back. Night has completely settled, the neighbors quietly resting in the arms of Morpheus, the god of dreams.

Julian's voice broke my train of thoughts: "Why don't you come to bed?"

I turned my head to his direction. He lifted his head partly from the pillow, trying to get a better view of me in the shadows.

"You're thinking of your son so much."

I took a step toward him and sat on the side of our bed. Julian fell silent and I sensed that he was trying to feel my thoughts. I finally laid down beside him.

A long silence. I thought Julian went back to sleep, when he finally spoke again:

"Your son is old enough."

A bit surprised, I laughed softly. "So you are thinking about him, too."

"You think I can avoid that?"

"Are you mad at him?"

"You're the one who's always mad at your son, not me."

"I'm just afraid."

"So, now: is it fair for you to forbid the kids from doing what they want just because you're afraid?"

"I am a mother, Julian."

"Amanda, *I am* a father. They are my children, too. I feel for them as deeply as you do."

"You said men are tougher than women. That you are practical and not emotional like us. I presume we mothers feel more intensely when it comes to our children."

Silence. Even by the faint light of the room, my eyes detected the disapproval in Julian's face. "But they are my sons, too!" And there it was, in those pained, simple words, the message he wanted to convey, the depth of his own feelings.

Silence again.

"I just don't know how to talk to him," Julian admitted after a short while.

"Because you're always busy," I replied in a mixture of question and accusation.

"No. Because I cannot understand him. I do not know how to make him see it my way."

I fell silent.

Julian let out a deep sigh. "Yes, I don't understand him. I want him to see it my way but then again, I must respect his right to follow his heart, to walk where his dream leads him."

"Because he is a man?"

"Every man should have something he'd die for," Julian's epilogue. He was slowly getting up from bed. "A man who has nothing he'd die for is not fit to live."

He then rose and took a step toward the door. He murmured that he needed a smoke, went out of the room, quietly closing the door behind him. Maybe he's going to the library with a drink in his hand, smoke a couple of cigarettes, bury himself in his work and find solace in the privacy of his own thoughts.

I was tempted to go after him and tease him if only to ease the heaviness between us. I wanted to tell him, "I know who said that, Julian. That's a quote from Martin Luther King!" And maybe he would laugh at that, realizing that I know that he has just "plagiarized" a very famous person. But I could not bring myself to do it. I felt buried under an intense feeling of sorrow.

Why can't we talk more instead of walking out on each other in the middle of some conversation? Why can't he ever share with me his innermost, deepest emotions so we can really blend as one? Why does he always close the door on me?

Chapter 9

EVELYN WENT INTO labor in the wee hours of the morning. At the very onset of her labor pains, Gani went into panic. He startled us with his frantic pounding on the door.

"Mom! Hurry up, Mom! The baby is coming!"

Evelyn's case is what the doctors call dry labor. She was admitted at 1:30 in the morning and remained in the delivery room for many hours. Gani had become terribly agitated, repeatedly voicing out nervously: Is the baby not coming out yet? What is taking them so long? Look, Mom, that other woman is already being wheeled out of the delivery room... Evelyn got here before her! Tell them to attend to Evelyn first, please!

Much as I was getting nervous myself, it warmed me to see Gani's concern. I could not help commenting, "You see, you really do love your wife, after all."

He looked embarrassed, as if he suddendly realized that he does love Evelyn.

I laughed. "Of course you love her! She is your wife. The mother of your child."

Gani looked straight at me. "I suppose you will say next that when two people love each other, they can overcome all difficulties? That love can move mountains?"

"What a cliché! Not literally move mountains, of course. But if you love her, you must stand by her. You must stand by the life that you are building together."

Gani fell silent. He looked thoughtful, maybe suddenly regretting all the quarrels and angry exchanges of words between him and Evelyn.

After a while, he said, "You and Dad are much better than us...I never saw the two of you fight."

"Of course we have our own issues," I answered. "We just keep them to ourselves."

A sad look crossed Gani's face. He looked away. "Sometimes I think... maybe Evelyn does not think well of me. Maybe I am kind of weak. I cannot compare to Dad."

His words hit a sensitive spot in me. Is he trying to say that I cannot stand up to his father the way Evelyn stands up to him?

"Why do you have to compare yourself to Dad?" I asked finally.

"He handles his marriage well."

There. He said it. The exact words could have been *"He handles his wife well."*

I could feel my temper rising. I wanted to snap at him: why is it that you men cannot stop comparing yourselves to one another? Why do you regard almost everything as some kind of competition among yourselves?

It suddenly dawned on me that all the men's bravado and sense of superiority could actually be all for show, that deep within they could be quite insecure. The way Julian puts it, that this is a man's world... I wonder if in keeping with this concept of masculity and power, man not only aspired to build his own castle but had become watchful of other men's capability, from where the seed of rivalry was planted and soon, quietly, subconsciously, exists even among fathers and sons.

Stop it, I said to myself. Even if you're pissed, it's still inappropriate to think that way.

"Gani, it takes two to tango," I said calmly. "When it was your dad and I who got married, we were prepared for our life ahead. So it's not fair to say that he is better at taking care of his family than you... or that I am a better wife than your wife."

IT'S A GIRL for Gani and Evelyn. Her skin is as fair as Evelyn's, but she has Gani's nose and Julian's mouth. I find it hard to control my desire to dote on the first baby girl in the house of the Bartolomes.

"How little!" exclaimed Bingo when we finally brought the baby home. "But she's already wrinkled, Mommy... how come?"

Jason agreed with him completely. "And she already has eye bags. Like she already has a lot of problems in life!"

To which Evelyn replied: "That's because she was conceived amidst the storm!" But I could see that it was simply a joke this time, not intended as a barb or an insinuation.

Somehow, just like all newborn babies, Anna Lissa brought her mother and father a little closer. Gani stayed home more, and now more than ever, he was affectionate towards Evelyn. And although he has gone back to college and earned the eighteen units required to qualify for the US navy, he was not so keen about enlisting anymore.

Evelyn reminded him that the deadline for application is in a few days.

"I feel like I don't want to apply anymore," he said.

"Well, it's up to you."

"We won't be able to go to the States then?"

"I said it's up to you," On second thought, Evelyn added: "But if I were you, I would submit my application just the same. Who knows, you might actually get accepted. Now, even if you got accepted and you feel you don't really want to go anymore, you can always back out."

"How about you, what do *you* want?" Gani asked again. Looks like this son of mine has a big insecurity, really! He cannot even decide for himself!

Evelyn reiterated her answer. "I said it's up to you."

"Your honest opinion."

Evelyn giggled. "Why, it would be great to get to live in the States!"

And so Gani submitted his application to the US Navy's administration office in Clark Field, Pampanga.

Soon it was the opening of the school year again. Time again to make the usual list of expenses: backpacks, school things, books, uniforms... tuition fees, miscellaneous expenses, Bingo's PTA (Parent-Teacher Association) fees, Em's ROTC (Reserve Officers' Training Corps), Jason's CAT (Citizen Army Training) and materials for electives...

"Jason... please do better in school this time," Julian pleaded with Jason. "In the past school year, you did not even finish a single one of your projects! You made us buy everything: books, drawing boards, T-square, even a bunch of crap for electricity... but we never saw even a small piece of finished product!"

Jason scratched his head. "You see, Dad... sir always has a deadline. Whether you meet the deadline or not, he'll give you grade."

"And you can't ever meet the deadline, even for once?"

"Dad, you know well that manual work is not my thing. I'm just obligated because those are my projects."

"Then tell your sir manual work is not your thing!"

"Do you think he will take that kindly, Dad?"

"And tell him your dad doesn't like throwing away hard-earned money, for God's sake!"

Lately, Julian has become a bit short-tempered. I can't help thinking that this has something to do with Jules, who hasn't come home until now.

But at last, a letter came, not a letter sent through the post office but one that passed from one hand to another until it finally reached Em.

"It is from Jules," he announced, and my heart skipped a beat. I had this momentary glimmer of hope that Jules was just right here in the city and not anywhere far away. Because how else could a letter simply passed from one person to another easily reach us?

"Who gave it to you?" I asked Em. "Is Jules somewhere near?"

"Someone just came down from the countryside."

Oh.

The letter was written on a small piece of paper folded several times to the size of a half stick of cigarette. When I opened it, I saw that it was for Gani, not for me.

It felt like a blow on my head. He wrote only once... and it was not even for me!

But it was just a poem, written by the Indian poet Kahlil Gibran:

Your children are not your children,
They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing
for itself.
They came through you but not from you
And though they are with you
Yet they belong not to you...

I read the poem over and over again. Once, twice. Until I was certain that in a way, it was also meant for me.

Okay, I thought bitterly; it's like you're saying that you have completely ended your relationship with your mother, and that your mother should stop having anything to do with your life! Alright, suit yourself. You're old enough, do what you want.

I counted the money for the children's school expenses. The school materials I need to buy. Cross this out, cross that one out. Deduct here, deduct there. I deleted everything that was for Jules. I'll just use this money for Anna Lissa's crib. I'll just keep this amount for my own use!

There is no reason for me to still prepare for Jules' school expenses. It seems to me he is not going back to school anyway, which can also mean that he is not coming home... *ever*! Maybe the universities are becoming too small-time for him. Maybe he really wants to move there, to the wider and richer university that Marx spoke of: the university in the community of *real* people!

I weep for the uncertainty of whether Jules is ever coming back home. I weep with the thought of him dropping out of school. Should I still think of him? He who only came through me but is not accountable to me... the valiant son of life!

Chapter 10

IN AN EARLY MORNING in October, on a day I least expected it, Jules finally came home. I was holding Anna Lissa outside the house under the cool morning sun when I saw him coming towards me. I did not even recognize him immediately. His hair was longer than it used to be, this stranger who was approaching me now. A travelling bag was slung on his shoulder. He was holding a denim jacket, and he appeared to me like a homeless child. His entire appearance had lost the bourgeois look and complexion of children reared in a clean and well-trimmed environment. His skintone was that of a farmer's... the boy who was brought to and from private school in an air-conditioned car while he learned his ABC's? His arms were sturdy as well, arms that seemed strengthened by hard work.

"Jules?" He was already in front of me and yet I was still unsure. Yes, he may look only twenty-one, but it looked like the twenty-one years of one who has been through a lot of sufferings early in life, who still had traces of pain from things he saw and experienced. A pair of eyes that are now tough as they peer, the look of one who had discovered the harsh realities of life and faced them head on.

"Is she my niece?" Smiling, he reached for Anna Lissa's tiny hand.

"Don't jinx her," I said for lack of anything else to say. I laughed softly at how old-fashioned those words sounded.

He laughed as well, a cheerful laugh. "Is that all you're going to greet me with... don't jinx her?"

I stretched out the hand I supported Anna Lissa's back with. I reached for the face in front of me, caressed his cheeks, his hair. I pulled him close. He reciprocated with a tight embrace. He buried his face on my hair.

A sob escaped from my throat. I could not speak anymore. Never mind that he regards himself as one who simply came through me but has no accountability to me. He is still my son... and nothing can ever change that.

"I missed you, Mom," he whispered. "I missed you so much!

"Welcome home, Jules," I whispered back. I tried to smile despite the tightening in my throat.

"WELL, THIS CALLS for a celebration!" Julian laughed hard when he saw Jules. But I knew that it was not all that he wanted to say. He did not simply want to tap and grab his son by the shoulder but to hug him tight like he would not want to let him go, or maybe run his fingers through his hair like he used to do when Jules was little. He actually stopped short of doing that, maybe because to his mind, it is not a manly thing to do. Or maybe he wanted to maintain that distance between them.

Maybe time really comes when the age gap between father and son disappears, the distance of years closes and though the title "father and son" remains, they become simply two men, two equals, each independent of the other.

They exchanged news over bottles of beer: about Gani's baby, Gani's acceptance to the US Navy and his scheduled training in San Diego, California. The Southeast Asian Educational Tour Em might join in the coming semestral break. The neighboring countries they will explore, the situations they will observe, and the things they could learn from the exposure.

About Jason's habit of wandering and staying out late.

"But *Kuya*, we don't have that much to learn in school anyway, right? That will only deprive us of our youth!" Although it was clear that Jason was only taunting Julian.

Julian shook his head and murmured, *tsk-tsk*! As long as it is Jason, the most Julian will do is shake his head and murmur *tsk tsk*. Which encourages Jason to show off more.

"In English, that's what you call getting away with murder!"

Laughter.

Jules noticed that Bingo is getting taller, too.

"You can start drinking now," he joked as he ruffled his hair. "You are almost a man now, you know. Out there, children younger than you can already handle guns."

A slip of the tongue and everybody fell silent. The mood changed to one awkward moment for all.

Jules was immediately embarrassed, realizing that it was the wrong thing to say. Julian quickly changed the topic. And I knew that Jules sensed that his father still does not want them to talk about politics.

At last, evening fell and Julian called it a night and we were finally in bed. We were both quiet, deep in our own respective thoughts. I could not help noticing the space between our bodies, like we cannot ever be together, even as we are both trying to find answers to our unspoken questions about ourselves and our children.

"It's okay," Julian suddenly said in a tone that sounded more to himself than to me.

"Huh?" I responded, feigning surprise.

"It's okay," Julian repeated. "So far, so good. There are still nights when all the kids are here with us. And we even have a daughter-in-law and a granddaughter to boot. That's not too bad."

I took a deep breath. "Yes," I replied softly. "So far, so good."

Julian did not speak again. But I could hear his loud and deep sighs. I wanted so much to console him, tell him it's okay, Jules is here, all in one piece. What else can we complain about?

I hunger to get close to Julian and let our bodies feel each other.

I turned sideways and rested my arm on his chest . "Julian?" I called softly, hoping that he would guess that I wanted him to at least give me a hug.

He patted my hand. "Go to sleep," he said. Like a gentle command of a father to his child.

I felt a bit hurt and offended.

YES, JULES IS here at last, but he has not totally "come home". He spends more time in other places. E-D. (educational discussion), D-G (discussion group), stay-in... Even if he does not say it, I know that these are the things that are keeping him busy. I am certain that he both teaches and learns a lot from there, things that one would never learn in the academe.

I got used to him bringing out clothes and never bringing them back home. I got used to him leaving with nothing but the clothes on his back and be away for a week or so and when he comes back, he would be wearing a shirt that I know did not belong to him. He always said that I should not worry, he just have work to do. Some work that I cannot put my finger on... surely some work that provides no salary.

Sometimes he brings home a bagful of reading materials that he keeps locked in his closet. Sometimes he brings home a "friend" and asks if the friend could stay with us for a few days. Julian and I are reluctant to accept them as we know they are from the movement but then, this is also Jules' house so we give in. It comes as a pleasant surprise to me that these young men have the initiative to help in the household chores. They are easy to like at least. Even if you worry that they are among the "illegal" people in the city.

Among them, I liked Domeng the most. Domeng was an easy person to have around. "You might not believe it, Tita (auntie) but cooking is my forte. And you know how I became a champion cook? Because..." and he would feign a snivel. "I am the cook in our house!"

I would laugh teasingly. "No, no, it's all right. If your cooking comes out below par, I will be in hot water. I will have to admit that you did it and Dad will be after me for treating our guest like some domestic helper!"

"If my cooking comes out below par, I will make it up to you by cleaning every room of this house!"

And I would laugh harder. "Never mind the cleaning because Em loves doing it. Do the garden instead if you want. We have a lawn mower out there in the garage."

Best of all, Domeng was patient with Bingo. If only because of his relationship with Bingo, he would surely endear himself to me, especially because Jules has completely lost time for his youngest brother. And as for Gani, Em, and Jason... well, as Jason puts it, forget it, they have outgrown "snivelling children" a long time ago.

I just have one worry. Does Domeng say anything to Bingo?

"I don't understand you, Mom... what could he be telling me?"

"Like the things Kuya Jules says."

"You mean, like something to do with revolution?"

"Yes, like something to do with revolution."

"No, nothing," Bingo shook his head. "The only thing he tells me is that I should ask you to buy me a ten-speed bike!"

That is the worst thing Domeng ever said to Bingo!

It saddened me when Domeng finally said goodbye.

"But I have to at least spend Christmas with my family," he said.

"You're right," I agreed. "Christmas should be a family reunion. Alright then... when are you coming back?"

"I don't know, Tita. But I will surely drop by next time I happen to be in the city."

LAST DAY OF the year, 1974.

Towards the end of every year, other than looking forward to a better year ahead, people also review what their lives had been over the past twelve months. Had it been a happy period in their lives? What could have been their weaknesses that they should resolve to overcome?

People usually make new year's resolutions although more often than not, they remember the list only in the first days of the year. In a few days or weeks, they will release themselves from the rules that they imposed on themselves. It is, after all, everyone's desire to be free; free to go their own way and indulge in their own vices.

I don't ever make new year's resolutions. Instead, I always look closely at my home, not on the physical side of it but on the relationships that bind my family together. Has Gani and Evelyn's relationship really improved, or have they reverted to the old tendency to disagree on small things? Em is of course doing well in school but Jason... well, he still dumps unfinished projects on us, and asks for money for various school fees which I only recently discovered are mostly imaginary. But of course I did not mention that to Julian. Especially since Jason has admitted to me that there is this very pretty girl in school that he takes to lunch sometimes and... well, you know... it will be such a shame if the boy does not foot the bill for both of them.

Bingo is growing up, too, and starting to have his own circle of friends. He is weaning himself away from his brothers. In fact, he has begun to resent it when Jason meddles in his activities. And he takes care of his homework himself. He even tells Em to stop teaching him because he has his own English!

A while ago, he had this disgusted look on his face so I asked him what could be wrong.

"Nothing," was his short reply.

"Really, nothing? Come on, best friends' secret!"

"It's Kuya Jules."

"So, what about Kuya Jules?"

"He is a communist."

My smile faded slowly. "Why do you say that?"

"He reads Mao."

"So?"

"Mao's the president of the communist."

"Of a communist country, you mean. And so?"

"Dad said it's no good in communist countries. If you're rich, all your wealth will be taken away by the government."

"Dad said that?"

"It's almost the same because Dad said that all the resources there, all the capital, is owned by the government. All the people work."

"That's good, then. So no one will be lazy."

"Even the women, Mom?"

"That makes it better then, when even the women take part in achieving economic progress for their country."

"Even if you have a little child?"

"You know what?" I explained further: "They have nurseries there that take care of young children when mothers go to work. And those are maintained by responsible, trustworthy people." But how about developing strong family ties? my mind asked, which my own mind answered as well: It's not the quantity but the quality of time a family spends together that counts.

"But Dad said, out there, your salary is just enough to cover your needs."

I know what Jules would say to that: *Better than here where many people do not even earn enough to cover the needs of their family.*

But I did not say it.

"What if you want to have a car?"

"I understand that bicycle is the main transport in China."

"But what if you do want to have a car?" Bingo insisted. "Will the government tell you that you don't need a car?"

"I don't think it is a question of the government taking away your right to have a car," I explained carefully. "Rather, I think that for a country to become communist, the people have to agree to it. A head of state does not just dictate the kind of government he wants for his country... he lets the people decide.

In China. they went through a revolution. The communists won so their form of government became communist. They were the majority. They were in favor of paying people based on their needs, they were in favor of delivering women from just being wives and mothers. They built nurseries so that mothers are not tied down to their children but instead, allow them to join the workforce and become contributors to the country's economic progress. They ride bicycles instead of cars so that they can save on gas. They all agree that the most important thing is to feed every single one of their eight hundred million citizens."

Bingo pondered on this. When he lifted his head to face me again, he said, in a half question half accusing manner:

"Then you're in favor of what *Kuya* Jules wants?"

I was stupefied for a second. Then I laughed: "I haven't thought about it yet!"

"You now sound very much like him."

IT IS THE last day of the year and I could not help but look into myself, too.

Another year has passed and I remain like I have always been. My days are filled, that's true, but only with the things I have to do for my family. I have yet to do something for myself, something that will make me happy.

I shook my head. This is not the time for sorrows and regrets. I lifted my head to watch the colorful fireworks rocketing upwards and exploding in red-yellow-blue-green lights. Music is playing full blast around the neighborhood, drowning the softer blow of carton trumpets and the *ratatat* of wooden toy guns. Boom sounds are carried over from afar and the explosion of firecrackers splits the ear.

Then, during the lull in the explosions and the music, my ears caught the rhythmic pounding and chanting of some familiar tune:

pak-pak...
pak-pak...
pak-pak-pak,
pak-pak!

Slowly, I recognized the rhythm. It is the rhythm of chants shouted in collective voices during rallies before martial law.

Marcos,
Hitler...
dictator,
lap dog!

The rhythmic pounding is repeated over and over, leaving me gaping in amazement. Is that some group of playful youngsters in the neighborhood simply having fun or some muted way of voicing out the continuing struggle of the people?

I slowly turned my gaze to Jules. He was starting to pick up the chanting, his face lighting up, acquiring the unmistakable glow of hope and cheer.

Julian suddenly shouted. "Happy New Year!"

Our voices drowned in the din of skyrocketing fireworks and explosions of firecrackers and sirens coming from different directions, this time not to announce the start of curfew hours but the dawning of the new year. We are indeed in the threshold of year '75, hopefully bringing with it a peaceful even if not a bountiful new year. A year safe from confusion, illnesses, accidents, raids, mass arrests, encounters, assassinations... and the senseless murder of young people.

Chapter 11

ONCE AGAIN, JULIAN tried to make Jules see that the government is not at all ignoring the problems of the common people, that it is actually doing its best to effect change and progress. Here is a copy of Today's Revolution that President Marcos himself wrote. It may not be a great reference book but at least it offers a glimpse of the thoughts going on in his mind. Why is he averse to a bloody revolution? Maybe because he is a man of a more laid-back generation where men put utmost importance to the stabiliy of both family and nation. Maybe because he is past the age of brazenness and audacity. Or maybe because he had seen enough pain and suffering in a war that he was compelled to be part of and he did not want a repeat of that experience.

Here is one copy each of the "reactionary" readings and manuals of the different agencies of government. Vital documents on Agrarian Reform Program under the New Society. Masagana 99. Samahang-Nayon—Julian's propaganda materials versus Jules's propaganda materials.

In his own way, Julian tried to show not only Jules but also the others that we have the best in a democratic society compared to the democratic society according to the ideals of the "other side". Seems to me he is also fighting to save his other sons from Jules' influence. Sometimes I am torn between wanting Jules to leave and wanting him to stay, wondering if it would

not be such a relief if he leaves for good, even if it also leaves me the endless worry of a mother. Because I am afraid that the uneasy truce between him and his father would in the end break into an open animosity.

Because even though Julian tries his best to stand by his principle about men having the right to follow his conscience, I know in his heart he is deeply disappointed with Jules, that Jules has turned his back on a life as "normal" and as standard as the children of his peers.

AMIDST GANI and Evelyn's unstable relationship, Gani got his schedule to fly to San Diego, California to undergo training in the US Navy.

"You take care of my wife and daughter for the meantime, Mom?" He pleaded with me.

"Don't worry, we won't neglect them," I promised. "But Evelyn mentioned something to me, that she wants to stay with your in-laws for the time being?"

A shadow passed over Gani's face. "Let her if that's what she wants. She's been nagging me about that for a long time now."

"Why? Is there something about us that she doesn't like?"

"No, I don't think it has anything to do with our family."

I did not push it anymore. "Alright. Just write to her always."

And so less than a week after Gani left, Evelyn reminded me of her plan to go back to her parents. I could not resist asking her the same question I asked Gani:

"Is there something about us that you don't like?"

"No, Mom," she replied. "It's just that I want to work for a while. I will have to leave Anna Lissa with my mother."

"You can always leave her with me."

"Dad would not like the idea," Evelyn replied with certainty.

I could not contradict that. She has been around Julian long enough to know his stand when it comes to women. It doesn't take much perceptiveness anyway, to see the unequal relationship between me and Julian. I wonder if she also suspects that this inequality remains consistent even in bed?

Good grief. I'm taking everything everyone says too personally. What's happening to me, really?

I feel embarrassed that Evelyn knows too well that I could not insist that she and Anna Lissa stayed here, not if she wants to find a job. It is so embarrasing that in my house and in my life, my decisions can never prevail.

The house has become as quiet and lonely as a convent with Anna Lissa gone, and it is so startling to have the silence ripped by the sudden calling of my name:

"Amanda?"

I was so taken aback I almost jumped out of my skin.

"It's late, what are you still doing down there?"

"I just loaded the laundry in the washing machine. Why?"

"At this hour? Come upstairs now."

We have been together so long I immediately knew what Julian has in mind.

But through the years of this togetherness, not once did he tell me directly why he wanted me to come upstairs. Or why he wanted me to lock the bedroom door.

"Amanda!"

"What's the matter?" I asked again. I don't know why, but I feel like it has become important to me to have him give me a direct answer.

Julian is already pissed. "What do you mean, 'what's the matter'? Just come upstairs, that's it! It's late! The wash can wait until tomorrow."

I wanted to tell him again that I just loaded the laundry in the washing machine and that I couldn't leave the machine running. I will have to shut off the machine and take out the pants from the soapy water. Otherwise they would bleed, the color will fade. Both water and detergent would then go to waste.

I wanted to say no, I don't want what he wants. I'm not in the mood. Maybe later. Or better still, some other time. Allow me time to get myself in the mood. Why, for God's sake, when it's me who wants it, you ignore me? It's time to even up the score.

I wanted to get out of that part of our relationship. I must be too old for that.

No, I'm not too old. It is just that I have long dreaded any invitation for sex. It never brought joy to my heart. And it's important that those moments bring joy to a person's heart. If the heart is wounded, the body becomes limp. His body pressed against mine only makes me realize more acutely how far apart we are, breath and heartbeat as close as can be and yet in my heart, we are like two people standing on opposite ends of some immeasurable distance that we cannot cross.

Or maybe I'm still upset by what Evelyn might be thinking of me? But of course it's just all in my mind.

"Hey, I'm calling you!" Julian yelled.

It suddenly occured to me that lately, the times that Julian makes me come upstairs and lock the room has become few and far between. He is aging, he is getting old. The thought made me want to laugh. Suppose I tell him that he's getting old and losing his virility? Can he accept that?

"Damn it, do you hear me?"

"I don't understand why you're calling me!"

"Because I'm calling you!"

"Yes, yes, but why?"

Julian is really mad now. "Why are you even asking why?"

The washing machine stopped. I unplugged the cord, drained the water, and followed him upstairs. But his mood was gone. His heart is wounded, and his body has become limp.

MY-LAI MASSACRE. Tie up of the peso to the dollar. America's defeat in the longest, most expensive, and most frustrating war he ever engaged in. Here you can prove, as Jules says, that victory is not defined by the power and aggression of the invading nation but by the will and determination of a people defending their sovereignty and the dignity of their country.

As early as 1969, America has already deployed half a million men to Vietnam and in 1970, American citizens themselves were seen marching on the streets demanding the pullout of American troops from the war-torn country. To the soldiers on the battleground, it has ceased to be a case of trying to win the war but has become a case of trying to survive. Up to the last day of Johnson's presidency, all he aspired to do was to win the war; from the first day of Nixon as Johnson's successor, all he tried to do was to end it all.

Eventually, the American soldiers down to the last troop pulled out of Vietnam. Members of Philcag (Philippine Civic Action Group) who were also sent to Vietnam presumably to do humanitarian work, were sent home as well. The war has entailed such a huge price that America's economy suffered, and part of America's desire to recover his losses was to make us *lower* the price of our exports and *raise* the price of imports - both in the form of raw materials and finished products. In short, increase the price of the dollar and lower the value of the peso.

Exporters lost interest and entrepreneurs dependent on imported materials for their products went bankrupt. And because the equivalent dollar reserve in the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (Central Bank of the Philippines) dictates the strength or weakness of the peso, the overall economy of the Philippines was gravely affected.

Jules' explanation is very simple:

"If you owe America one dollar, before, you only needed four pesos to buy one dollar to settle your bill. If the dollar is now worth six pesos, you will have to come up with six pesos to buy one dollar. Now think of how many pesos you need... if the money you owe America is in the billions of dollars!"

Okay.

What's not okay is how Jules' ideals have started making impact on Em, who I feel is being drawn more and more to Jules' line of thinking.

AT THE TIME EM joined a group of students in a seminar held in Baguio, and even when he represented his school in an educational trip to other third world countries, he had very little interest, if at all, on the political issues of the country, much less on the implications of martial law; his mind focused only on his desire to become a writer someday, his spare time spent on youthful activities like basketball and sometimes getting infatuated with girls his age.

Until he entered college, obtaining full scholarship in the state university. He loved books and worked hard to maintain his scholarship. I am so proud of him and thankful that the campuses have nothing going that would reignite the unrest and chaos of pre-martial law years... or so I thought.

But suddenly, he was also into the familiar complaints regarding tuition fees, the continued banning of school papers, suppression of academic freedom, and illegalization of the students' most effective weapon: the student council.

"You've been hearing stuff from your brother," I lamented. "Don't tell me that you're thinking of dropping out, too?"

"I'm not going to do that," Em answered lightly, adding half-teasingly, "School is where the action is!"

I had a sudden attack of anxiety, maybe because of the word *action*. What does he mean the action is there?

"You don't know this. Mom, but it's not true that the students have kowtowed to the government," and this time he was serious. "Student organizations are on the way to consolidating their forces."

My fear grew deeper. "Don't tell me that you've already joined these organizations!"

"Mom, you're so cooped up in the house that you're not aware of what's happening out there. Because Dad makes a lot of money you're not affected by the skyrocketing cost of living. But it impacts so strongly on the marginalized people in our society."

My God, it's like it I am hearing Jules again!

"The price of every single basic commodity has gone up, but the wages remain as they were before, not enough to live decently, not commensurate to the toil and sweat of the common worker."

"Em, excuse me, but we are not talking about the cost of living or the wage of the common worker here. What I want to know is whether you've also been joining some anti-government activities."

Em looked at me intensely. "The atmosphere of the times is still what it was like before, Mom... it was never quelled. There still remains massive labor and student unrest."

Chapter 12

JULES HAS BEEN away for more than a week when he sent word that he wanted to see me. It was a message sent through word of mouth. Jules sent somebody to convey the message to Em. Em said that the person stressed that it is urgent. The word "urgent" was alarming to say the least.

I felt afraid. This is the first time he sent word for me to meet him somewhere away from the house. Why doesn't he just come home, or else give me a call? Why did he need to just send a message through somebody I don't even know? Even Em has no idea what this urgency is all about. Can it be a hoax? Em said he knows the person who conveyed the message to him, but that this person also seemed to be in the dark—the guy has not personally talked to Jules but received the word from someone that Jules first conveyed the message to.

Did something bad happen to my son? No, my son is very much alive; otherwise he would not be able to send word to me. Neither could he have been arrested or injured because the place mentioned is not some detention cell or hospital but a bookstore.

Could it be just about money? I should bring with me a few hundred pesos, maybe a thousand, to help him out. I would scold him for making me apprehensive, but I would give him whatever amount I have in my purse.

There was not a trace of him when I got to the bookstore although I was ten minutes late. Look at that rascal; he is making his own mother wait! But just two or three minutes later, I saw him crossing the street towards me.

He does look all right to me. Still all in one piece, as they say. And the son of a gun was grinning from ear to ear!

"You made me wait!" I accused him in mock anger. Since he was okay anyway, then it was also okay for me to sound like a mother.

He laughed a little. "You just got here. I saw you. I got here early enough, just waited for you from across the street."

He beat me on that one!

"So, what's this fuss all about? Why don't you just come home, or else tell me on the phone what you want?"

"We cannot talk on the phone."

I remember the news about telephones being bugged. I did not push the issue.

"So, aren't you even going to ask me to have coffee with you?" Jules was still smiling.

"Me?"

"Why, you're the mother, you hold the purse!" With that, he put his arm around me and led me to the restaurant across the street, straight to the second floor, down to the corner table away from the crowd.

He ordered immediately. Clubhouse sandwich. Salad, too. And spaghetti!

Then, he asked me: "What about you, Mom?"

"Goodness!" I exclaimed jokingly. "I thought that's already for the two of us!"

The waiter waiting to serve us laughed.

"I'll just have some mango juice," I told the waiter.

We exchanged pleasantries until our order arrived. Jules devoured his food like he has not eaten for days. My heart went out to him. He looked really starved!

"You may want to order something you can take out," I told him lightly. "So you will have something for dinner, too."

"Can I, Mom?"

"Of course!"

"Not for me, though. For someone else."

I felt uneasy. I immediately sensed that the person he was referring to is someone special to him. Mother instinct? Or maybe it was the concern in his voice? He is of course twenty two, but he has no regular job. The idea does not sit well with me.

"A woman?" I asked.

"She's close to me. We are not into a relationship yet but I like her a lot. We are in the same field of work."

I wanted to ask her name but I am well aware that those he introduced to us as Leni, Eyang, Nognog, and others, are not their real names but names they assumed in the movement. Except for those he had known way back, some call him Pete instead of Jules.

"Has she been to our place?"

"Just once."

I stared down at my mango juice for a moment before I lifted my eyes to him again. "And she thinks your dad and I are okay?"

"Of course!" Jules replied, surprised. "Why do you ask?"

"Nothing. It's just that we parents care so much about the impression we make on our future children-in law."

Jules laughed. "That's still a long way, Mom. And anyway, Mara is a nice person."

"So Mara's her name?" I searched my mind for someone introduced to us as Mara.

"But we are not into that kind of relationship yet."

"Even if you already are won't bother me."

"And that's not the reason why I asked to see you."

"That's what I'm dying to hear. Where are you staying? Why haven't you been coming home again?"

Jules lit a cigarette and seriously lifted his eyes toward me. "Promise you won't get mad?"

"If you're going to tell me that you're getting married, that's fine with me. Maybe that's what you need to put some order in your life."

Jules looked saddened. "You still don't understand. I have committed my life to this, nothing and no one can make me leave this life. I won't commit my life to anyone who is not committed to this life as well."

I have no answer to that. I heaved a long sigh.

"But if getting married is all that I'm going to talk to you about, I'll just come home." He bowed his head a short while then lifted his face again. "It's about Domeng, Mom."

The mention of Domeng's name lifted my spirit. I really long to know how that rascal is! "Oh, Domeng! So, where is he? You tell him that I'm upset with him, okay? He never even dropped by again!"

Jules's expression hardened. Contempt seeped from underneath his soft voice. "We found out that he is… an infiltrator."

I was stunned. "What?"

"An infiltrator. Let loose by the military. In their payroll. He joined the group to spy on our activities."

"What?" I could not believe this!

"He used to attend E-D's. We thought he was really from the ranks of the workers. He was a brilliant undercover agent, I have to give him that. He fooled us for a long time. Until we found out that he is actually working for the PC!"

"I don't understand!"

"That's all I can say," Jules said, and there was indeed urgency in the timbre of his voice. "He infiltrated us, period. He's paid by the military. He reports our every move to the military. He has already betrayed a couple of our safehouses... he's already gotten a number of us arrested."

Domeng, who was dearest to my heart and closest even to Bingo?

"That's why I cannot come home just yet. I don't want to alarm you, but our house might be next in line." I groped for words but he held my hand and went on and on. "Mom... please clean out my stuff. Burn my reading materials. Don't leave anything to chance. If some military men came, tell them I've been away for a long time. You don't know where I am, we haven't seen each other in a year. If Domeng is with them, deny that you know him. Tell them yes, it is possible that you've seen him before but you can't remember."

"But why?"

"You're still asking why?"

"Can Domeng do that to us?"

"Mom, don't you still understand? That is exactly what Domeng is getting paid for in the military."

"But we had a good relationship with him!" I still insisted.

"Good relationships have nothing to do with this. Debt of gratitude has nothing to do with this. This is a question of doing what one has to do. A question of fighting for what one believes in!"

He leaned forward a little bit more and added, still keeping his voice low:

"Struggles happen even within families, you know. Someone in the movement got captured and it was his own father who squealed on him. There is also one I know who was killed by his own brother!"

I felt horrified. What Jules was saying was so hard for me to comprehend, my mind refusing to take them all in.

I could see the pain in his eyes. He smiled bitterly and repeated what he has just said: "No, Mom...we're not talking about personal relationships here."

Silence.

"We will burn your reading materials," I said after a while. "We will tell them we haven't seen you for a long time. What else?"

"If they invite any of you, don't just go with them. Should they insist, call anyone in authority, even a barangay official... anyone who can make them sign a statement saying that they took one of you or that they took a few things from the house. Get their names, ranks, units, everything."

I wanted to cry, I wanted to be angry. I wanted to lash out at him for the danger that is now looming over our entire family.

He held my hand across the table. "Mom, don't say anything, please. Don't show any anger." And in a firm whisper, the most important thing at the moment: "We are in a public place!"

Chapter 13

JULES KEPT HIS arm around my shoulder as we leave the restaurant. Tighter this time; a quiet pleading for me to understand, a silent conveying of his own worry, his feeling of guilt.

The sky has darkened and headlights underscored the setting of night. Neon signs were beginning to light up and blink, zoom in and out, vanish, and reappear on the signboards of book shops, movie theaters, department stores, beer houses.

"Where are you staying?" I asked Jules.

"At a friend's house."

"I'll walk you to the jeepney stop."

"No, Mom. You get a ride first. I'll take care of myself."

I don't feel even a bit of anger anymore. I am overcome with worry for my firstborn. I feel like I don't want to let him go. "If you need anything, just send word."

"Don't worry."

"You take care, Jules."

He answered with a tight squeeze on my shoulder.

After a few moments... "Mom?"

"Yes, Jules..."

"I might be away for a long time. I will not be able to get in touch then."

Which set me more on the verge of crying. I had to do all I could to control the tears.

He hailed the approaching jeepney. He kissed me on the hair. "You take care, too, Mom. And... Mom... I love you. I love you and I love Dad and I love my brothers, too."

My eyes misted. Inside the jeepney, my tears finally came. How long will my son be away from us this time? My God, being a mother sure isn't easy!

EVERYONE QUICKLY went to work, helping one another gather Jules's books and magazines, newspapers and newsletters and feeding them all to the fire. Julian wanted to see first how subversive they really are, Em wanted to just keep them in a friend's house because he felt they are important. But we were so hard- pressed to discard everything the soonest time possible.

We gathered everything that might possibly give us away and fed them to the fire, including unlabeled cassette tapes without bothering to find out what were recorded in them, a reproduction of a raised fist painted by a renown artist, a picture of a cultural group in the likeness of Juan Luna's "Spoliarium", slides featuring farmers used by a religious group in some powerpoint presentation, an address book with a few names and contact numbers, a Christmas card with a progressive greeting, even stationeries and pendants made by political prisoners in Camp Olivas.

Julian finally let out steam: "Damn, this is exactly what I've been saying all along!"

I did not say anything. We were so pressed for time. We have to hurry, do what we have to do right now. The complaints can come later.

"All of us are at risk now because of what that son of yours is doing!" As usual, just *my* son.

And then he added:

"Take your son's pictures so we can throw them into the fire, too!"

I froze. Is Julian disowning Jules now?

"I mean the latest ones. Just keep the old ones, those that don't look much like him anymore. Sometimes these military bastards are just shooting in the dark, they do not really know the faces of people they are looking for!"

I heaved a sigh of relief. Julian was actually protecting Jules' identity.

Jules' room has already been stripped bare and I was still searching. Inside cushions, behind the locker, underneath the bed. There might still be some letters left. There might be a bullet stuck somewhere in there, just like what the military allegedly found stuck in the foams inside throw pillows and in a can of milk powder in a house that they raided.

At last, I was convinced that nothing subversive could be found in our possession even if some military men turn the whole house upside down. And there was nothing left to do except wait for the soldiers Jules warned me about. I wonder how we would face them? What if they read the lies on our faces? Would I be able to look straight into Domeng's eyes in case he was with them? The bastard, would he be able to look straight at us?

We would tell them that we haven't seen Jules for a year - isn't that already an admission that he's been in the movement for at least a year? And what kind of parents are we if we are not even looking for our son, not even taking steps to find him?

Would they believe that Jules does not even write to us, that we are not aware of what he is doing?

I don't know how I would be able to handle the situation just in case. Julian says let it be; we will cross the bridge when we get there.

A dog would bark deep in the night and I would get up. I would peek out the window half-expecting to see the shadows of men in uniform. I would hear word that unfamiliar faces are in the vicinity, and I would comb my hair and make sure I look decent enough in case these strangers drop by. The car that I saw pass by going to the direction of the house of the barangay leader is heavily tinted, and I am instantly convinced that they are military men, going there to ask where exactly is the house of Julian Bartolome, Jr.

And in the morning when I open my eyes, I would whisper a word of gratitude that another night has passed without any untoward incident coming our way. We are still safe so far. Like some criminals given a reprieve from their assigned date of execution.

After two weeks, I began to wonder why the military has not yet paid us that much anticipated visit. Another week, and the long wait was starting to kill me. Let us get it over and done with, for God's sake! Two more weeks... can it be that Domeng has forgotten to take the raiding team to our house? A few days more and it crossed my mind that maybe they decided that we were only "a small catch" not worth wasting their time on—a thought that made me feel somewhat slighted and belittled. I had to console myself that actually, it could be because there is only one person they could capture here compared to two or more they could be rewarded with in other places.

Every now and then, Julian and I still talk about Domeng. And every time, I never forget to mention that he has caused many people to fall in the hands of the enemy. And that some of those people might have been tortured and killed.

"No, I won't take it against him," Julian would say. "Your son is living his convictions; why would you take it against those on the other side who are equally committed? They may be on opposite sides of the fence but they are equally valiant soldiers of our time."

Our lives are normal again. At least, our lives are still normal. Truly a bourgeois and blessed life, if you count the cost of private schools and the circle of middle-class friends and the overseas calls not everyone can afford.

PEOPLE SAY absence makes the heart grow fonder; I hoped this will be proven true with Gani and Evelyn. In his letters, Gani always says that he misses his wife and daughter and he hopes we check on them often.

Sometimes I call up Evelyn in her office although not often enough because I know she has work to do. And I would tell her that Gani has been asking how she is, not mentioning the question that bugs my mind. I am sure Gani is sending her letters, too; is she writing to him in return?

I could sense a bit of uneasiness in her voice when we talked. Sometimes there was a long pause on her end, like she was searching for an excuse to end our conversation. This annoys me a little but I try to rationalize that she could be so busy and that I should keep our conversations short.

She is now saying that Gani has a letter to her too, her voice bland.

"Oh, what did he say? Are you working on your visa now?" Gani's petition for her and Anna Lissa has been forwarded to the US Embassy in Manila.

"No, Mom, we don't have a visa yet."

"Are you taking care of it? Have you checked with the Embassy?"

No answer.

"Hello? Evelyn?"

"Mom, my boss is calling me. Can we talk another time?"

I drew a long sigh. "All right, bring the kid over sometime. We miss her so much already."

I like to think of myself not only as a good mother but as a good mother-in law as well. Of course I would not tell Gani anything negative about Evelyn, like her seeming disinterest to follow up on their visa. That there was at least one time when she cancelled our appointment because she said she could not be absent from her job, that it happened to be a most inopportune time to take a leave of absence.

"Maybe it would be better if you resign from your job for now," I blurted out that time. "So you'll have the time," for which I was immediately sorry.

And when I sensed in Gani that he was starting to have doubts with his wife, my stories almost got tangled with each other, about how Evelyn was also getting impatient, her longing to leave for the states so they could be together, the Embassy people being difficult—all that I could think of to say just to erase whatever doubt he must be starting to entertain.

I wrote to him, one after another. I wanted to console my son even through my letters.

I also tried to call Evelyn again, twice I did, even if I got peeved both times because the person who answered the phone said that she was not there and I felt that she was avoiding me, considering that she did not return my call both times.

In the end, I got this letter from Gani, where he said something that made me feel weak all over.

"You can stop lying to me about Evelyn, Mom. She told me herself that she's sorry... but she has no more plans of coming to the states."

Chapter 14

AFTER I WENT over and over in my mind what Gani admitted to me, after I was able to accept that this really is none of my business and that this separation actually was a long time coming, I decided to see Evelyn. I visited her in her parents' house, bringing a lot of presents for Anna Lissa.

She looked uneasy about having to face me, a little bit rattled even. When she took the seat across from me, I felt that she was keeping her distance.

I made up my mind that I would not say anything about her and Gani's separation. If she wanted to talk to me about it, well and good. All I will do is listen.

But I did not say that I would not say anything about *our* separation, did I? So I talked about it, said that maybe when they leave for the states, before Anna Lissa and I see each other again, she would be a teenage girl who would probably be more fluent in English and knew only a few words in Filipino. I tried to sense her reaction. She was getting more uncomfortable, almost squirming on her chair.

Until she could not take it anymore and blurted out:

"Hasn't Gani told you anything about us yet?"

I feigned innocence. "About you?"

"Yes. About us."

"Ah. About you and Anna Lissa."

"Not about me and Anna Lissa. About him and me."

But I am not an expert on lying. With just that, I confessed:

"I thought that maybe you were just upset. Maybe you are just enjoying your work so much and—"

She cut my sentence short. "No. I thought hard about it before I made my decision."

Silence.

"I am sorry, Mom... but I have to be honest."

I looked straight into her eyes. "Is that why you don't even want to talk to me anymore? Why you won't even come to the phone when I called?"

"I don't want to talk about it on the phone."

Again, silence.

"I thought you were excited to go to the States," I said afterwards. I could no longer hide the pain this is causing me. "The change of environment might be good for both of you. Gani even told me he already saw a house where you can live. Don't you want your family to be together? And in the States, no less! Life is good there!"

Evelyn shook her head again. "Whether it's nice there or not is out of the question."

Silence again. Too many silences between us, I thought.

At last, I was able to ask something that has been troubling my mind since I read Gani's last letter:

"Have you met someone else?"

Evelyn stared directly at me. "Mom, that's not always the reason for a breakup."

"I have told both of you before, you're still too young..." I said with lack of anything else to say. I'm not sure whether the bitterness did not creep in my voice.

I have been wondering how Gani is dealing with this. My poor son, this at a time when he is all alone out there!

"Gani was really hoping— ..." I stammered.

Evelyn took a deep breath. "People change, Mom," she said softly. "I no longer feel for him the same way I did before."

I suddenly remembered something that Jules has said: *The only permanent thing is change.*

I rose from my chair. What she said was really painful to hear. I felt like crying, which of course I did not want to do.

I said goodbye.

But after I thought a lot about it (again!), after I talked to myself seriously (again and again!), I decided that I have no right to get mad at Evelyn. That's her decision, that's her life. I just feel bad because the one involved here happened to be my son.

Eventually, I knew I have to tell Julian about it.

"What can you say about couples who separate?"

Julian raised his head a bit from the wide-open pages of the morning paper. "Why?"

Did I detect a flash of fear in his eyes, like he was instantly afraid that I was talking about us, that I was about to announce that I want a separation? Poor Julian. Maybe deep inside, he could also sense that something is not quite right between us.

"No, I'm not saying that I want a separation. I just want to know what you think about it."

Able to relax and breathe easily now, Julian buried his head again in the papers. "That depends on the reason for their separation."

"What if, for example, the desire to separate comes from the woman?"

"Why, what's wrong with her husband? Does he hit her? Is he neglectful of his responsibilities?"

"No. Her husband is a nice person. He has a good job, he provides for them, he does not womanize..."

"That woman must be insane!"

"But those are not the only measures of a good marriage, Julian. Sometimes couples just grow apart. One of them loses affection."

"Aw," Julian turned the pages of the newspaper. "If your marriage is a good one, why would you lose affection?"

I pondered about this. There are questions so difficult to answer. Like how good our marriage is from Julian's point of view.

"Maybe..." I said, "maybe their marriage is not all that good."

"Why is it not all that good?"

"It could be that the woman has other things she wants to do aside from being just a wife!"

"Like what, for example?"

"Like for example, having her own job."

"I thought the man has a job?"

"You know, when someone says 'job' to you, you immediately associate it with salary, the amount of money a person brings home."

"What else, then?" Julian insisted. He is becoming really obstinate, I thought. Nothing could come out of this conversation. He really would not understand.

"Tell me what else?"

"Sense of achievement."

"What?"

"Even a woman wants some purpose in her life, you know... seeks to find her own fulfillment as a person."

Julian took a deep breath. "I don't understand you. Alright... just continue with your story about this couple who got separated."

My turn to take a deep breath. "That's it, they separated. They married when they were too young. Did not give themselves the chance to grow a little more. Did not listen to parents' advice that they should wait."

"Well, maybe the woman was already pregnant."

"The woman was indeed already pregnant."

Julian laughed loudly. He got it right, and he felt real proud that he got it right!

"And they really thought before that they could not live without the other," I continued.

"Well, they got themselves into it, they should deal with it."

I was starting to get annoyed. "You know, Julian, that reasoning is no longer in vogue. If you don't want to stay married anymore, you owe it to yourself to get out of it."

Julian's laughter was fading away, he looked ready to dismiss me. "Suit yourself. I don't want to argue."

"That's why I admire the woman. She is strong-willed. She has a mind of her own."

"Okay, okay. Who is this couple you are talking about, anyway?"

Time to drop my nuclear bomb. "Evelyn and Gani. Evelyn is not joining Gani in the states anymore."

And Julian froze. I turned away but not before catching a glimpse of his gaping mouth.

RIIIINNNGGG!

"Hello?"

"Mom, it's me. Evelyn."

"Oh."

"Are you mad at me, Mom?"

"Me?"

"You don't sound happy that I called."

I laughed a little. "I did not expect you to still call me," I said.

"There has never been an issue between you and me."

"But you said that you don't love Gani anymore."

"My relationship with him is separate from my relationship with you. It may have been over between us but I hope... you and I... I hope we still regard one another as family."

My eyes felt hot with tears. "You know that you and Anna Lissa are always welcome with me."

"What about Dad?"

I laughed out loud now. I was getting excited, suddenly realizing how much I miss her and Anna Lissa. "You know Dad. If he ignores you, you can just ignore him back! Just pretend to yourself that he is just some, you know, flower vase...some intricately made, decorative urn!"

But of course I was kidding. I have to find out for sure how Julian feels about Evelyn now.

"Is it alright with you if Evelyn and Anna Lissa come for a visit?"

"Why not? That's my granddaughter you're talking about!"

"I'm also talking about Evelyn."

"Suit herself! What do I care about her problems with Gani, anyway?"

"You sound like you feel resentful towards her."

Julian faced me squarely. "Why is it that you keep doing this to me now?"

"Doing what?"

"Pressuring me, what else! You're forcing me to answer questions that I have not even thought of!"

"Do you still need to think about that? We have had a good relationship with Evelyn!"

"You worry about your relationship with her, I'll take care of mine!" With that, he rose and stomped to the direction of the library.

I followed him. "You just feel bad because she got one over your son... and your son *is* the man! But if it happened the other way around, and your son was the one who broke off with her, you would simply say he should follow his heart. That he has rights. That it is within his human rights!"

The door of the library closed on my face.

"Julian?"

"Shut up, Amanda!"

"Julian, when you're ready with your answer, let me know, okay?"

No answer.

I turned the doorknob. I pushed the door open and appeared in my entirety to Julian.

"Julian, I said – "

"Why are you so persistent? Are you gonna leave me alone or not?" But to my surprise, he broke into laughter. The kind of laughter that one wanted to suppress but failed miserably. Maybe because this was the first time I was "after him" not because I was after him *per se* but because I was after him to see things my way, and he finds it both odd and amusing.

When Evelyn did visit us the next day, he was even nicer to her than before!

And I consider that as one of the highlights of my year '75. When I pestered Julian and won the issue by the sheer virtue of nagging and persistence!

Chapter 15

EM HAS TURNED eighteen and his love for writing is indeed taking hold. There on the latest issue of a weekly magazine is his short story about the personal struggles of one entering adulthood. Although in my opinion it can do with a little more editing, overall it has successfully expressed the highs and lows of life as a teenager.

But what bothers me is that, the story segues into the social ills that did not escape the eyes of the main protagonist. Don't they say that writing exposes the innermost thoughts and heart of a writer? That the writer almost always has a part of himself in every character he creates?

Still and all, I am proud of my son getting his work published, and it's nice imagining him winning top prize at some prestigious writing competition like the Palanca awards and the CCP contest.

As for Julian, he may be impressed with Em, too, but not with the writing profession.

"What do you get out of writing?" he asked.

"Why, shouldn't we be proud to have a writer in the family? Goodness, not every couple who do things in bed can produce a child like that!"

Julian glared at me, not at all pleased with my seemingly worsening language.

I corrected myself right away. "I mean... they say writers are born, not made."

"I would rather that your son becomes a lawyer," he said. "Or a doctor, an architect, an engineer. They serve a bigger purpose. They are the ones who advance laws, medicine, technology..."

My enthusiasm dropped. "Writers are the conscience of the people, the ones who preserve the sanity of society," I insisted.

"Of course not!" Julian retorted vehemently. "Some writers even connive in keeping the people in the dark. Even those in the field of journalism do not tell the truth anymore."

I looked straight at him. "So that's the way you see things, too?"

"Everyone sees it that way."

"But it wasn't like that before."

"It's the way it is now."

A short pause.

"And... above all, how much do writers earn? Probably not even enough to buy their own cigarettes."

"What's wrong with you is that money is all that matters to you."

"Because in this life, everything has a price," he explained not too patiently. "Even love sometimes has a price. A man's status in society is defined by the money he makes. People won't extend to a utility man the same respect they extend to a congressman for example... regardless of how honest the utility man is while the congressman is deeply involved in corruption and anomalies."

He has a point there of course.

"Maybe then, the more we need writers to make us rethink our values. They can do great things with their pen," I said.

"Like what? Science fiction? War movies? Love stories? Writers are very imaginative people, all right. They make you laugh, they make you cry... but it's not all fun and entertainment that people need. You want to be great, you do something great. Invent something, contribute something to technology, make some scientific discovery, build a business empire..."

I suddenly thought, and blurted out: "Then how come laborers who toil in the factories and make industries grow not recognized but brushed aside as unimportant and dispensable? If you come right down to it, they are actually the ones behind the country's economic progress."

Julian's arrogance is overwhelming. "Laborers are just all hands. They are not the ones who design buildings and bridges or invent machines and computers. I won't bother sending my children to school only for them to become lowly laborers!"

Lowly laborers. Is that how insignificant they are in Julian's eyes? I suddenly realized that men like him, the brains behind the most minute details of the giant machineries of development, actually believe that machines are the most important and trustworthy components of production, not the workers whose hands do not work half as fast, who, in their eyes, have nothing in them except their restless minds and equally restless stomachs; not to mention the fact that machines simply, obediently, run and operate, but never complain and organize much less stage a strike.

While Jules stands by his conviction that the workers are the most important partners in progress. That machines are nothing but machines, not equal to and especially not superior to human beings. They should not have been created to replace the labor force of a nation as some capitalists are wont to think, especially those who terminate workers because they have already acquired these machines and "modernized" their factories. The main purpose of the machine should only be to ease the burden of work from the laborers.

I cannot figure out how a father like Julian bore a son like Jules. Or how someone like Jules happened to have a father like Julian.

NOW LET'S TALK about Em.

Soon, it became impossible to talk about Em without also mentioning the current situation of the country, because the situation in society is the cast that molds people like Jules and Em.

I can now talk about these with clarity, now that I have completely turned my mind away from petty things like anti-aging creams and other beauty products and became more mindful of the events unfolding outside my comfort zone. I might not be as politically conscious as those in the "movement" and their allies, but I have awakened to the events that greatly affect the greater part of Philippine society.

Martial law continues to be in force and human rights organizations remain vehemently opposing it in all legal fronts, particularly Red Cross and the London-based Amnesty International, that inspite of the PC being on the lookout all the time, continually send—sometimes through the backdoor—representatives in the country to investigate cases of disappearance, military abuse, armed encounters, raids, and mass arrest of suspected communists.

The Kalinga-Apayao communities remain unrelenting in their fight against the proposed Chico Dam project that will bury their barrios, farms, and sacred cemeteries under water. Actively defying the executive order that prohibits any kind of mass action, a thousand informal settlers from Tondo marched to Malacañang to protest government's plan to demolish their homes and give way to the building of a container port. By the sheer force of their organized and determined action, Marcos was compelled to stop the demolition.

But luck was not on the side of the *batilyos* of the biggest fish port in the Philippines. In the middle of the negotiation with company management to smooth out some internal problems, they were invaded by *another* company, a representative company of a Japanese corporation sanctioned by our government to "modernize" the fishing industry of the Philippines. Other than being fired from their jobs, the *batilyos* also lost their homes, the lands they occupied seized by "modernization". The mistreatment they suffered gave birth to their alliance and their collective voices called attention not only in the Philippines but also in Japan itself, Australia, Netherlands, and the United States.

In line with Imelda Marcos' beautification program. the homes of about 160,000 informal settlers were demolished, the first batch in 1974 when the Miss Universe Pageant was held in the Philippines and the remaining ones during the World Bank/ IMF conference in '76, when the government was paving the way toward the realization of Imelda's dream of building a modern city complete with a financial center, enormous hotels and restaurants, Embassy, Convention Center, Cultural Center Complex—a high-class city patterned after the city of Florida, USA. The informal settlers were thrown out of the city and relocated twenty miles away where there were no jobs and no basic services like water and electricity. To Imelda's thinking, they only have themselves to blame for their misfortune; she says that they should not have come to the city in the first place, where they have not even a place to sleep in.

"So why do I build a Heart Center or a convention city instead of urban mass housing?" Imelda reasoned out. *"Because I believe we just can't do that. I don't believe in building houses for everyone because I don't want our people to be mendicants."*

The anger continued to live and grow in the hearts of the people, and the alliance of those in the lowest stratum of society became wider and stronger.

In Mindanao, the struggle of the Moslem separatist movement to establish their own government continued to intensify. Islamic countries like Libya and Saudi Arabia supported the struggle and threatened to cut off our oil supply should the government refuse to recognize the revolutionary MNLF as the official representative of the Moslems, which greatly contributed to the problems of the government.

Before long, Em 's writings veered away from the trite and the run-of-the mill, but focused on the socio-political issues of the time. First to see print is about the Bataan nuclear power plant that the government planned to build in 1976, an article based on the data he gathered during his month-long stay in Bataan—told us he was just taking a vacation in the house of a distant relative, never anything about the research he was doing.

The disaster created by nitrogen gas leaking from the nuclear power plant in Three Mile Island, USA, causing panic-evacuation of people and becoming front-page news all over the world has not occurred yet at the time. The citizens of Bataan were still silent about the issue but according to Em's article, fear and objection have already taken seeds in their hearts. They know that the plant would kill the rich farms and fisheries around the area to the detriment of the farmers and fishermen, not to mention that the money to be used for the plant would entail additional debt for the country which in turn would entail additional burden to the Filipino taxpayer. Most of all, they are well aware of the dangers of radiation in case of an accident. That it would cost lives and affect the survivors in a manner similar to the bombs the US dropped in the cities of Nagasaki and Hiroshima at the close of the second world war. Diarrhea, leukemia, cancer will break out and death is inevitable.

But even on normal plant operations, the leakage of radioactive materials cannot be avoided, which will slowly kill the people, especially because the pressurized water reactors of Westinghouse, the partner company of the Philippine government, did not pass through the regulatory review of the United States.

The experts were also acutely aware of the politics involved in this project. Considering that it will be built proximate not only to the Bataan Export Processing Zone but also to the US military bases in Subic and Pampanga, there was no question that the multinational companies will benefit the most from the energy harvested from the plant. The plant will be powered by uranium, the waste material of which is known to be the best material for nuclear weapons that will be stored inside the US military bases, which are here primarily to protect the interest of the multinationals.

Further, in case of war erupting between Russia and America, precisely because the US bases in the country are where America's nuclear weapons are stored, they will necessarily be the target of an attack, or several attacks, by enemy forces to the incalculable cost of Filipino lives.

"But the people are afraid to speak up," Em said. "They are afraid of being branded as subversives."

Em's extreme audacity leaves me quite disconcerted. Somehow, Jules is fighting the battle underground while Em, with his pen, seems to be going right on the frontline of the struggle!

Chapter 16

JASON USED TO be small and skinny, but grew taller and better-built after circumcision. His voice has changed, sometimes sounding like Dad's, often cracking, which elicits laughter among us.

From games of chess and basketball, he started to have a bottle or two on special occasions. He also often brought his friends over, sixteen-year olds going through that phase in life when one can be impish and boisterous. But of course you cannot expect teenagers to be as best behaved as you want them to be.

Music is one of Jason's big weaknesses. There's nothing wrong with that, everybody loves music, but not the kind of music that blares down to several streets away (a bit exaggerated of course) with banging drums to boot. It makes no sense at all to me except threaten everybody's ear drums. I don't understand why this one seems to find peace and quiet in the noise he creates.

"He's a teenager," yelled Julian in the midst of the chaos playing on the stereo. "Teenagers are really like that!"

"We've already had three teenagers, but none of them are like that!" I yelled back.

"What?"

"I said Jules is not like that!"

"But Jules did not pass through the normal phase!"

"What did you say?"

"Jules is different!"

Goodness. I think we need to learn lip reading in this house!

"When it was Gani who was sixteen, we had no problems like this, either!"

"When Gani was sixteen, he was so busy making a girl pregnant!"

"What did you say?"

"Can you speak louder?"

"Nothing! I said, this one is very different from Em!"

"Em is a writer! Writers are a strange species!"

Suddenly, the music (or whatever you may call it) stopped. Somebody turned off the stereo!

And the fighting began!

"Is something wrong with your ears? Are you deaf?"

"When it's you who plays the stereo, I don't interfere!"

"You want the neighbors to call the police?"

"You hate music so much, it's like you're an old maid!"

Julian and I rushed outside at the exact moment that Jason and Em were aiming punches at each other.

"Hey, hey, stop it!"

"Emmanuel, Jason! We're right here infront of you! Be ashamed!"

Jason: "But he killed it, Dad!"

Em: "Put it in a sack, hide it from the police!"

Sometimes, youngsters exchange punch lines that we middle aged parents cannot easily decipher.

I am getting exasperated trying to make Jason listen. Jason, our neighbors are already complaining. Jason, Dad is on the phone... turn down the volume a little, please?

He will. But five minutes later, the banging will be back.

He is in his senior year and he still takes his studies for granted. He hangs around kiosks with friends as though they never run out of things to talk or joke about, sometimes simply watching girls in shorts and mini-skirts. It's a wonder he still manages to have passing grades.

"It's all in the personality, Mom," he would say. "And I heard that I got this amazing personality from Dad. Cool, eh, Dad?"

Julian would not ride on his smooth talk anymore. "Your reasoning is trite and antiquated, I'm not gonna buy that anymore."

But Jason would persist being impudent. "Why, Dad... antiques command a better price!"

The conversation is becoming confusing again, folks.

"That depends. If it's made of high quality material, then you can name your price. But before we stray away from the topic, we're talking about school, right?"

"But I never failed in any of my subjects, anyway!"

"Because seventy-five is indeed not a failing grade. And if someone is not really a dummy anyway, the teacher would allow them to move up... if only out of pity!"

"Come on, Dad... you're hurting my feelings."

"Besides, tuition fees are expensive. Teachers are afraid that even parents would themselves stage a sit-down strike right on the school's doorsteps. Teachers are parents, too, you know... so they can sympathize with those who pay your tuition fees. Do not do unto others what you wouldn't want others to do unto you. Simple golden rule." Julian cleared his throat. "Now, I don't exactly agree that this so-called golden rule should apply here. It seems to me that that's exactly the problem with our educational system, that kind of mass promotion. That's why we produce graduates who don't deserve their diplomas. Like you."

"I am not a graduate yet."

"But you will graduate soon."

"Because of my pleasing and magnetic personality. And the urban legend has it that I got it from you, Dad."

"Haha. Imagine, son, if you got both my personality *and* my brains ... why then, you would fit to a tee your mom's favorite poem. 'Someone to stand on top of the mountains to conquer the seas...'"

(Why God Made the Little Boys, in case you've forgotten; a poem that still hangs on our wall. And as always, Julian has the patience of a saint when it comes to Jason.)

"... maybe one day, you'll even become president. Imagine the Bartolome family living in the palace!..."

"No kidding, Dad?"

"I'm serious, Jason."

"Dad, serious cases should be rushed to the hospital."

I could not hold back my giggle. Julian finally got annoyed "Jason, I'm serious!"

Jason assumed a most serious expression. "Dad, I'm serious too. You mean to say, if I got your brains aside from your magnetic personality, I could become president?"

Julian, doubtful of what his son was getting at. "Why not?"

"Why then did you not become president?" Before Julian could snap back, Jason approached him and planted a kiss on his forehead. "Never mind, Dad. I love you regardless of what you did not become."

That's how Jason is: jolly, glib, loves to tease, but an adorable kid just the same. It's hard for either Julian or me to get mad at him because he is quick with a hug and "bribery"... which could be a bunch of flowers snitched from someone else's garden on the occasion of Mother's Day, or green mangoes from Mrs. Adriatico's tree that happened to be within reach from our side of the fence.

It could be a kitten.

It all started with me drawing a kitten for Bingo when he was in nursery school: a number 8 with arrowheads placed on each side of the head, whiskers on the upper half of the 8, and a tail behind the lower part. What are you drawing, Mommy? Jason asked. A kitten of course, I answered. I know, but why are you drawing a kitten? Because I love kittens, I answered. They are nice to hug. Like a baby.

Wow. But kittens cannot catch mice!

But they are nice to play with.

Mommy, is that your favorite animal?

Yes.

The very next day, Jason gave me a colored picture of a kitten cut out from a magazine. And one time, a plastic toy kitten, which he said he even saved up for.

And later, a *live* kitten he picked up from a gutter, already bathed and tied with a rose bow, so we christened her Rose. Kitten became cat and found a lover and got pregnant. On the night she gave birth, Jason stayed up until the wee hours attending to her because "there could be complications. And if Rose dies, Mommy will cry."

A picture of twin kittens. A framed picture of two kittens clawing at each other. A rubber sheet with kitten designs for me to give to Anna Lissa when she was born. Up until now, Jason remains convinced that the kitten is the most beautiful animal for his mother!

Really, in spite of his happy-go lucky dispositon and seeming irresponsibility, Jason is a loving and loveable son.

Chapter 17

ONE DAY WHEN I came out to the garden, I chanced upon Bingo intensely watching his pair of pet doves. He looked so concentrated you would think that doves are the most amazing creatures in the world.

I suddenly thought of Jules. It was not too long ago when Jules was of Bingo's age.

I approached him and started a conversation. "Bingo," I asked, "what would you want to be when you grow up?"

He looked startled by my question. "Huh?"

"What will you be when you grow up?"

He shrugged nonchalantly. "A man of course."

Jason, who happened to be within earshot, laughed loudly. "Mommy got shot down!"

I smiled. Bingo is indeed too young to bother himself with what he wants to be in the future.

One of the doves flapped its wings and lifted himself. The other followed suit. Bingo dashed to grab one but he was a split-second too late. The doves made their getaway.

Bingo screamed, terrified. "Mommy!"

"Ssh!" I said, putting my forefinger on my lips. "Don't worry, they'll come back. They'll just go around the place but they will come back."

"No, Mommy, I'm going to lose them!"

"No, you won't. Doves always know their way home."

"How do you know?"

"Because doves are like children. They go out of the house to play. Sometimes just to do some looking around."

"Looking around for what?"

"For fellow birds. They set out to explore, to discover. They want to experience things and learn from them. Just like you. At first, you rode your bicycle just up to there. Then you went farther. You rode around the whole village. Now we hear that sometimes, you even go outside the village."

"But I always come back home, Mommy!"

"That's exactly my point. Doves are not any different from children. No matter how far they go, they still come back home. Except when the family living in the house are not in good terms."

"What do you mean 'not in good terms'? How can doves know that people are not in good terms?"

"When they cannot come to terms and instead, disagree most of the time. Then the doves feel lonely and unwanted."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes. Then they leave for good."

It suddenly struck me whether there was something in our family that made Jules lonely and greatly contributed to his leaving for good.

We have not seen him for a long time. Has he really left for good?

"How can you be so sure that they are not leaving for good, Mom?"

"They are not leaving for good. Sooner or later they will come home because... because there's nothing wrong with our family. Except if..." I didn't want to alarm Bingo but he was waiting. My voice started to quiver. "...if they were captured or... killed on the way by bad people."

BINGO'S BIRTHDAY was in a few weeks and I thought maybe we should celebrate the occasion with a big party for children. It has been a long time since we last had some celebration in this house. Now was the chance for us to break the monotony and invite good vibes.

"Buy different kinds of masks," Em suggested. "It would be fun for the children to guess who's who."

Bingo: "I can have the most horrifying mask of all!"

Jason: "You won't need a mask then! Can there be anything more horrifying than your own face?"

"Jason, don't start again!"

"And freebies, Mom," Em added, ignoring Jason. "Various stuff that kids would love to have. Those that they will take even if you don't directly give it to them."

So I did host a party for Bingo's birthday and prepared the usual fare for children, more than enough for the expected number of guests: ice cream, spaghetti, hotdog, barbecue, fried chicken, a giant cake...

"I hope Jules drops by," I said to Em. Em had told me that he heard that Jules had come back to the city. "He knows that it's Bingo's birthday... and that we will surely have a little celebration."

I added more items to my list. Beer. In the event that Jules comes and he has company, they will surely be asking for beer. Em might also invite friends. Jason will surely have guests, too. And Julian. Children's parties usually turn into adult get-together towards evening.

Of course I called up Evelyn to invite her and Anna Lissa.

From the early morning of Bingo's birthday, I kept looking out the window hoping to see Jules coming down the street. I would look out whenever I hear the sound of a car or a tricycle.

Shortly before lunch, a tricycle did stop infront of our gate. I ran outside. It was still not Jules but Evelyn and Anna Lissa. Anna Lissa held under her arm a big box of present for Bingo.

It lifted my spirit that at least, the two of them are here.

"Thank you for coming early. Saves me from guessing whether you would show up or not."

Evelyn laughed a little. "Mother has actually been nagging me to go even before I had my breakfast. Said I should at least help in the kitchen."

Lunch was ready. I made sure there was plenty enough to go around. I kept saying again and again:

"I hope Jules will come."

At 3pm, the children started to arrive. They are now all over the place playing games that Em took care to prepare. For once, everyone was enjoying the din created by both children and adults.

The party is heating up. The pile of presents is starting to crowd one corner of the living room. Em is entertaining his guests in the terrace. I can say that they are engaged in serious conversation because they all look serious and are talking in low voices, so unlike Jason's group whose lively banter is sometimes punctuated with laughter and a bit of horsing around. Music is playing non-stop although this time they keep the volume in mid-range.

Jules is still not here. My hope that he would come is starting to fade. Maybe he is worried that the area is still under surveillance. That there is still the possibility of the the military suddenly showing up, thinking that a family occasion is a most opportune time to target the area.

By early evening, the party came to an end. The masks and freebies are all gone. Finally, the last group of kids left for home. I sent Em and Jason's guests, who don't seem ready to break up, inside the house so I can start cleaning up.

Evelyn wanted to help but I sent her home, too. "You still have work tomorrow," I said.

After seeing them to the door, I went back to the garden and surveyed the place for the great task ahead.

I went around the garden with a big-sized trash bag and started pouring in it too many crumpled napkins, leftover hotdogs, pieces of fried chicken, spaghetti, salad, cheese, bacon, cake, sliced bread, potato chips... Children sure waste a lot food, I thought.

Have to remind myself that these are children who grew up in private villages, children born with a silver spoon in their mouth as they say. One cannot expect them to recognize the value of food. They are children of the rich, they are used to throwing food away.

This is a whole piece of hotdog sticking in a fork. But it has been lying on the table for hours; throw it out. Yes, this is a serving plate but the food is already cold, no one's going to touch them anymore anyway; throw it out. Ice cream have melted in several cups, untouched; throw them out. Chunks of fried chicken dripping in sauce... even our dog that's been stuffing itself all afternoon will reject them. Just put them in the garbage.

I wonder what Jules would say if exactly at this moment, he arrives and sees this terrible waste?

My mind is wandering again, remembering the picture I came across in a magazine, the picture of a child all skin and bones debilitated by terrible malnourishment... one of countless victims of extreme poverty. I remember Elma, the blind girl Jules told us about. He said he met her in a secluded barrio in Bicol. "She fell ill when she was little. Many of the people in the barrios have not seen a doctor all their lives, only *arbularyos* (herb doctors), who was unable to stop the disease from spreading up to her eyes. She's just as big as a six-year-old although she's of the same age as Bingo. Sweet potatoes are all her family eats... and they eat only once a day. One time when I was in their house, she came to me with a handful of fireflies ang gently rubbed them on my face."

Why should I feel guilty? Julian has a good job and we both came from middle-class families. Our children are children of middle-class parents. Poverty prevailing in many parts of the country is not our fault. We don't even owe it to anyone to give away any of our children to some movement for change.

Yes, I understand the feelings of the laborers and the *lumpens* of the resistance movement. "They have nothing to lose but their chains"; but this is true only to them. I don't understand the involvement of young people like Jules who otherwise have bright futures in store for them.

But the question keeps coming back to my mind in a bigger and deeper sense. There are reasons. Did we ourselves contribute to the reasons behind the dreams and struggles that even young people like Jules take part in? From the food wasted in parties his mother can afford to his father's career as an engineer, whose brain and prowess greatly contribute to the creation of giant industries that enslave workers, who helps give life to the giant machines that replace and displace thousands of other fathers...

I can only wonder.

I thought about Gani. Can it be said that he is a slave too, of the US government? A paid slave to protect the interests of the gods? How could two men, cradled in the arms of the same mother, reared by the same set of parents, grow up taking opposite directions in life? Could it be possible that sooner or later they could become bitter enemies?

I chide myself. I must not think that way. What the hell is happening to me that so many unwelcome thoughts keep intruding in my mind?

Chapter 18

I GAVE UP waiting for Jules. The night has settled and I am dead tired. The house is quiet now. Em and Jason are in their beds, Bingo is asleep, too. And Julian is burning the midnight oil with some papers.

Night after night, he stays up late working in the library. And there are nights when I feel an intense longing for him and the children to be with me, like this very moment.

How long has it been since Julian and I had a quiet conversation? But have we anyway ever talked about ourselves, about things seemingly trivial and unimportant but are actually vital towards keeping the relationship beween wife and husband close and intimate, "to keep the light of love burning" as the romantics would say. I have this nagging thought that he has only been using his work as a most convenient excuse to stay away from me, that we are more and more being alienated from each other.

Have we really known each other through the many years that we have shared the same bed? What do I know about his work for example? What do I know about the people he associates with and the things that really make him happy?

Even our sex life has become few and far between. I have begun longing for those times... longing for his body against mine, if only to feel that we are still together.

I faced the mirror and studied my own reflection. Have I become too old and unattractive even to my own husband? It makes me feel so downhearted that I have reached this age without discovering whatever it is that is missing in my life.

I shook my head. I must be freaking out to be doing a lot of shaking of my head lately.

I lay down. I need to sleep. What if I go to Julian in the library and tell him that we should go to bed?

He might get annoyed.

So what if he gets annoyed? Husbands do get annoyed sometimes.

In spite of my uncertainty, I did get up to go to the library, in a sense going after him again.

He did not get annoyed, just puzzled.

"Something wrong?" he asked.

"Nothing," I answered truthfully. "I just miss you."

Julian stretched his body and leaned against the swivel chair. He smiled at me.

I glanced at his pen which is one of those expensive kinds. At his branded lighter and the imported pack of cigarettes. At the several crumpled sheets of paper in the trash can at the foot of his table. Julian wastes a lot of paper.

I was again seeing the wastefulness of the middle-class .

I sat on the couch on the opposite side of his table, thinking that I have never sat on his lap, the way some women do in the tv serials that I watch. Of course it is usually the other woman instead of the wife who sits on the lap of the man.

There lies on the center table the latest copy of Playboy Magazine. I am used to seeing issues of that magazine with him, but it is only now that I wondered whether he really needs to look at those nude photos and read those sexy articles to get himself in the mood for me.

Julian has good looks. And he has money and prestige, dignified in the way he carries himself. Even before, I have seen one or two women flirt with him. Could it be possible that he is carrying an affair with some woman out there? You know the saying, that the wives are always the last to know?

Stop it, Amanda; I whispered to myself. What drove you in here and entertain thoughts that might break your marriage? You sure are freaking out!

I blurted out another thought I had been preoccupied with lately. "I wonder how we'll be in a few more years."

Julian raised his eyebrows. "Huh?" and I could not decide what startled him: was it my question or him suddenly remembering that I am here sitting across his table?

"In a few more years. When all the kids are married and have their own families. When we are back to where we started, just the two of us."

Julian laughed. "We still have at least ten-fifteen years before that happens." He picked up his pen and bowed his head on the paper.

"Time flies so fast. Not too long ago, it was Jules who was eleven years old... and eleven years have passed since then."

"Oh?" He glanced at me with a smile. "I did not realize that."

"Julian, you are forty-eight... and I am forty-six."

"I feel like I am only twenty-eight."

"I feel forty-six."

"Life begins at forty."

"Life begins *to end* at forty."

Julian suddenly looked worried. "Is something troubling you, Amanda?"

"Many things," I admitted.

"Like what?"

"Nothing. I don't know exactly what. Just many things."

My answer confused him further. He stared at me even more intensely.

I wanted to voice out the things bothering me but I could not find the right words. I can't even pinpoint exactly which of the many things going on in my mind makes me become so restless.

Julian took a deep breath. "You're probably just thinking of Jules again," he said.

I took a deep breath, too. "I don't know!"

"I know. You feel sad. But he's happy with what he's doing. He has the right to find his own fulfillment, you know?"

"You're right," I agreed. I rose from the couch. "I'm going to bed."

"Amanda, we have raised our children well, okay?"

"Of course, we have!"

"And I'm real proud of you," I felt the utmost sincerity in his words.

I smiled. "Thank you."

In bed, I kept thinking how funny that scene looked: Julian praising me and me thanking him!

I finally fell asleep, only to be wakened by the shrill barking of the dogs and the sound of car pulling up infront of the gate.

Julian is already sound asleep beside me. I could see from the half-open window that the black sky of a few hours ago is starting to turn blue. Dawn is breaking.

I got up, put on my robe and walked out of the room in tiptoe. The window on the other side offers a better view of the front gate.

A car is parked infront of our gate. I can make out the shadow of a man standing outside, his face tilted upwards. He whistled, short and not too loud. The dogs continued barking.

My heart started to pound. Is it Jules?

"Em?" he carefully called out.

I called back. "Jules? Is that you?"

He parted the leaves of the tree outside the gate. "Mom?"

It is indeed Jules!

I almost tripped in my haste to get down the stairs, half-ran to the front door to the gate. I was in a fit of laughter as I embraced him tightly. But he immediately broke the hug and instead put his arm around me and planted a little kiss on my forehead. "Sorry, Mom, it's you who woke up. It's only Em I'm whistling at. I have company."

He opened the gate wide and returned to the driver's seat of the car. I moved aside to make sure I didn't block the way. It annoyed me that his companion had to wait on his seat until

the car was safely parked inside, instead of him getting down with Jules and at least saying good evening to me. How rude.

Jules went to the other side of the car and helped the young man get down. That was when I saw that he could barely bend his left leg. He had to support it with one hand to ease it out of the car. I heard the soft and pained voice finally saying "good evening, Ma'm." He limped heavily as Jules led him toward the house, almost putting his entire weight on Jules, his left foot barely able to touch the ground. I watched them walk inside, wondering what in the world could have happened to him, wondering about whose car it is.

Jules settled him on the sofa, finally finding the time to introduce him to me. "Mom, this is Rene." He then told the young man to make himself as comfortable as he could while he locked the gate. I offered to do it but he was already on his way out. *Sus*! it did not even occur to me to lock the gate before I followed them!

Rene lifted his left foot with so much effort and laid down on the sofa. I ran for a throw pillow and put it under his head. "Let me heat some water for coffee," I said.

"Thank you, Ma'm," I don't know if he was thanking me for the pillow or the coffee. His breath was coming fast and strained.

I went to the kitchen and filled the whistling pot with water, set it on the stove, searched the ref for something that could heat fast in the microwave, tried to take my mind off the injury of this young stranger and the pain he must be going through. Maybe he has had an accident? My mind refused to entertain any possibility more serious and frightening than just an accident. What will Julian say about this?

Jules returned from the garage.

"Sorry for coming at this most unholy hour, Mom," he said, "but I could not think of anywhere else to go."

"I'll get you something to eat."

"We'll just get some rest, Mom," Jules replied as he again helped Rene to his feet. "We've been up all night," and I did notice how haggard and exhausted they both looked.

I nodded almost absentmindedly.

"I'm sorry, Mom."

"That's alright," I smiled faintly. "Let's help him to your room."

"Thanks, Mom, we can manage."

Rene murmured a soft thank you to me before finally taking a step. He winced and held on to Jules. Jules put his arm around him again and supported him up the stairs. The blood stain on his pants was now visible under the glare of the fluorescent light.

I waited until they made it to the uppermost step. The pot whistled, the water boiled. I turned off the stove. The microwave clicked shot. I hurriedly made coffee and arranged slices of bacon on a platter, put slices of bread on the side, and took them in a tray upstairs. They could not be falling asleep right away.

The door was not completely closed. I called Jules' name as I pushed the door open with one foot. Rene was on the bed, Jules helping him pull down his pants. He was wearing shorts under his pants anyway. As I lay the tray on the table, I caught a glimpse of the thick bandage stained with blood and iodine wrapped around his left leg. I left as quickly as I could.

I went back to our room. Julian was still sleeping soundly. I changed into a house dress and went downstairs again to make coffee for myself and prepare the family's breakfast. It was still early but almost time for me to get up anyway.

Jules was already sitting by the dining table, sipping the coffee that he brought back down.

"How is Rene?" I asked as I made coffee for myself.

"I have something to tell you, Mom."

My heart beat a little faster. I braced myself for some bad news. I sat down across from him.

"Whose car is that?" I asked.

"I'm returning it today."

"Right now?"

"As soon as possible."

"Can't it wait, Jules? Dad will be up in a half hour or so."

"Yes, Mom, but I can't stay here long, we can't take chances. As for Rene... nobody saw us coming so no one has to know that he is in the house."

"Wait a second. What are you trying to say, that you will leave Rene with us?"

Jules now talked in a pleading voice. "Please, Mom? There is no other place we can take him to. He is not from here and we sure cannot take him to a hospital and run the risk of the military finding him. Just for a few days, Mom? I'll take him back as soon as his wound heals a bit."

"Is that a gunshot wound?" I asked point blank. "He got it from an encounter, didn't he?"

Jules bowed his head and answered in a low, soft voice:

"Yes, Mom."

An intense cold engulfed me. From my head down to my toe, the kind of chill that penetrates the pores of one's skin straight to the marrows of one's bones.

Chapter 19

IN A RURAL community hundreds of miles away from Manila, a military operation took place. Rene's group returned fire and a battle ensued. There were fatalities on both sides. Rene was lucky enough to have been wounded only and was able to escape with some of the others. He was brought to the house of an ally where the bullet was taken out by a doctor friend. But he could not stay there for more than a few hours. They had to move him from one house to another until it was safe enough to pull him out of the province.

"What if the military finds him here?"

"We were very careful in coming here. Mom, please? Just for a few days?"

"I don't know. You have to talk to Dad."

Soon the family was gathered around the table and Jules had to repeat what he had already told me. The sun has risen, the quiet of dawn has lifted and whatever little security it offered was gone.

Jules explained again that our house was not in their agenda. But the safehouse they were supposed to take Rene to turned out to have already been evacuated because of some security problem.

"I have run out of options, Dad," Jules said pleadingly. "This is the last and only place I could think of."

Julian and I exchanged glances. I said again, "If someone finds him here, Jules..."

"We made sure no one has tailed us. Dad, please. Didn't you say that our home is open to all our friends?"

"Of course, son," Julian replied. His voice sounded tired. "But not to the extent of risking the whole family. Think about your mom, your brothers..."

Em responded quickly. "It's alright with me, Dad."

And Jason. "I have no problem with people. You know darn well that I love people. Does he love music, *Kuya*?"

"Now, Jason," Julian said. "Rene is sick, okay? If we're going to be hospitable, we also need to be considerate."

Jules took this as an indirect "yes". His face lit up. "So, Dad, it's okay? Please, Dad?"

Julian shrugged and waved his hands helplessly. "What else can I do?"

A while later, Jules said he really has to leave now. We saw him to the car.

"I'll come for Rene in a few days," he promised.

"Jules?"

"Mom?"

"I'll take care of your friend. I'll treat him the way I treat all of you. But you have to do something for me in return."

Jules's forehead furrowed.

"Next time you come home, have at least a day with us, please."

Jules sighed deeply. He put his arm around me and drew me real close. "I'll try, Mom. I miss being with you, too."

Before he finally boarded the car, Julian handed him a wad of bills. Gasoline money, he said. Jules tried to refuse but Julian was insistent. "You need to have a little money just in case of an emergency," he said. Julian's gesture warmed my heart.

I went to Jules' room to check on Rene. I found him seated on the bed trying to fold the blanket. The food on the tray remained untouched. Embarrassed, he quickly tried to put down his foot that was resting on the bed.

"Leave the bed as it is," I said as I picked up the cup on the tray. "Em can help you with that later. You want a fresh cup of coffee?"

"I'll just come downstairs, Ma'am," he replied politely.

"How can you come downstairs? You will just aggravate your condition. By the way, Jules has already left."

"Yes, Ma'am. He said goodbye to me. " Before I actually stepped out of the room, he added: "I'm sorry to inconvenience you, Ma'am."

I smiled at him. "Well, you can just make it up to me when you get well," I said lightly.

Just make it up to me when you're well enough; Em said exactly the same thing when he helped Rene to a chair and made the bed for him. Jason put it another way: *Just think of returning the favor when I need it,* when he returned from the drugstore to get him some badly needed antibiotics and brought him warm water to clean his wound.

Give it to me. I took the ointment and the bandage from Rene. His young face grimaced in pain, beads of sweat breaking out on his forehead, while I disinfected his wound with alcohol.

Look at these young men, I thought. They think nothing of exchanging fire with the enemies, but just drop a little alcohol on their wound and they act like they are dying.

A comfortable bed, a bowl of soup, close attention to his needs. In my heart, I was not doing this for him alone but for my own Jules as well. I never realized that I could see my child in the child of another woman.

I hope other mothers will do the same to all kids who need their help. If ever my son is taken to someone else's house in the same condition and circumstance, I hope the mother of that house will attend to him with the same care and concern that I give to this young stranger.

Soon, Rene can move around a little, make his own bed and even come down to have meals with us. He even offered to do the dishes, which I won't allow him to do because his leg was still not strong enough to stand for several minutes. Soon he was telling me stories, mostly about the miners in big mining industries who are forever exposed to the danger of explosion, cave-in, gas and chemical poisoning, poor working conditions, not to mention the radiation over and above the allowable limit emitted by the giant X-ray machine positioned by the door that they have to pass through everytime they leave work to ensure that no piece of precious metal is hidden in their pocket or even swallowed and lodged in their stomach.

Sugarcane workers shipped from Antique to Negros, bound to one another in a human chain to make sure that no one can jump to the sea and swim back to shore. Because the *encargado,* the person tasked by the rich plantation owner to recruit workers, has already made an advance payment to the families they left behind. One hundred pesos advance payment to each family, in exchange for back-breaking work and their dignity as human beings.

He also told me stories of valor: of women and children who once laid down on the street right on the path of the bulldozers coming to demolish their houses right here in the city. A march participated in by a thousand laborers, students, informal settlers, and religious communities on Labor Day '75 to protest the dismissal of several contractual workers in a move that symbolized the resurfacing of the urban resistance movement.

"I have heard about it," I said. "I even wondered why they were not stopped by the Metrocom. Perhaps the government is beginning to listen?"

Which surprised Rene a bit. "Listen?"

"The president stopped the demolition of houses, didn't he?"

"But right after, a number of workers and informal settlers were arrested."

Even Julian listened. Maybe he too is rapt with the passion by which Rene gives an account of the conditions in Philippine society. Maybe because Rene is not the child he helped with his math problems from the simple arithmetic to the more complicated areas of physics and calculus, to whom he found it hard to admit that he knew very little about history and politics.

The framework of the colonial apparatus within the Spanish period. The concept of land ownership and cash economy. Feudal systems that have been so engraved in our society. The spate of Spanish and Chinese landlords who enslaved the Filipinos and made them clear the mountains and forests either at gunpoint or by the whiplash. Favored Carlitas who became the Spanish king's beneficiaries of Philippine lands commensurate to the extent and expanse of the area that their horses were able to cover.

"We have landlord ancestry," Julian told Rene lightly. "And Spanish blood. Good thing I never thought of tracing my family tree. There could have been a lot of information that would bother me."

"But what our ancestors did is not our fault," Rene replied, suddenly breaking into laughter. "I myself have Chinese blood... and my great grandfather was a sea pirate!"

A camaraderie developed between Julian and Rene that when Jules came back to take Rene to another place, it was Julian who strongly objected.

"Son, your friend is not yet completely healed. There is still some possibility of infection setting in."

"You mean he can stay longer?"

"Of course he can."

All in all, Rene got to spend over two weeks with us, until his return to the countryside was properly planned and safely coordinated.

I felt a little bit sad when he was finally packing his meager belongings, not because I will miss him but because Jules had been dropping by more often—three times in two weeks!—while he was here.

"Seems to me he is the only reason you come over," I said to Jules with a hint of sadness. "What now that he is leaving? When are we going to see you again?"

He smiled at me. "Oh... maybe in a day or two. Maybe I'll even bring you some very important surprise."

Jules did come back as promised. He brought with him a very important surprise, indeed. A woman.

But what floored me was that, the woman is already... *pregnant!*

Chapter 20

JULES WAS BEAMING with pride as he introduced his female companion to us.

"Mom, this is Mara. And Mom, I have news for you: we'll be spending Christmas here."

Right! November has only a few more days left. Right, Christmas is in the air. So? Jules was outsmarting me, diverting my mind. He was telling me the very welcome news that he would be with us for the holiday so I can set aside the surprising news right infront of us!

Wait, wait... how did I know that she is really his wife? Who knows, maybe she's just a friend.

Don't be crazy. You can see with your own eyes that your son looks so lovey-dovey with her!

Mara is her name, he said. Wait. Mara... Yes, that's exactly the name of the girl he told me then that he was beginning to like. *"I feel close to her but we are not into a relationship yet."*

"So, Mom, are you still with us?" Jules asked, smiling impishly and passing his hand before my eyes.

I finally found my voice. "Ah, yes, come in! Oh, come in!" As if they were still not *in*! And frantically tried to get myself moving.

"Tsk, this boy Jason, he left his clutter here again. *Jasooon*! I wonder if Bingo is out again. *Binggoooo*! Em! Oh, there you are, Em! Come, talk to your brother! I'll get us something to drink!"

Yey, wasn't it's me who said that it's important for us mothers to make a good first impression on our future children-in-law? Great. Just great. Who in the world will be impressed with a future mother-in law who nearly went berserk when she first laid eyes on her future daughter-in law!

"Well, if you weren't such an idiot." It was Julian who voiced out how I felt, when at last we were alone with Jules in the library. "You have not said a word to us about you getting married. You just brought home a wife... and she's pregnant at that! And you expect your mother to be nonchalant about it?"

"I meant to surprise you."

"Surprise, ugh! We were surprised all right!"

I just kept on smiling. Because it was not only me who lost her bearing but Julian, too. If you only saw how wide he gaped in surprise!

"We've been together long enough now, Dad," Jules said.

"Yeah, we sure can see you've been together long enough. While we continue to be kept in the dark. We don't even know much about you anymore."

Jules just smiled. "I don't have to tell you everything, right? I'm a grown man. It's a man's world, remember?"

I could sense that Julian wanted to say more, maybe gripe about Jules dropping by only when he needed something, but immediately stopped himself. It is beyond him to show his sensitive side to any of his children.

"Now, Dad, seriously: I was also surprised that Mara suddenly showed up at our safehouse. We have separate areas of work. It's not that I have no plans of telling you. I was just waiting for the right time. And then, she suddenly showed up. Turned out she had a letter for me but got there ahead of the one she entrusted the letter to."

With what Jules said, I ascertained one thing: that they who are "on the other side" do not give primary importance to personal relationships, regardless of whether it is a relationship between two people who are about to have their first child. Their work is still the most important thing of all, everything else is secondary.

I told Julian about it when we were in our room.

Julian said: "You see, men and women look at love differently. For women, sometimes their lives depend on it completely. For men, it's just one of the many things that make them complete."

"I don't know," I replied.

"What do you mean, you don't know?" Julian insisted. "Look: There are so many other things important to a man: his work, his ambition, his hunger for success and power. For a woman, her husband and children are enough. At least that's the way I see it."

"That's not the way I see it," I argued.

"Think hard about it."

"You think hard about it. That's not true. Maybe your point of view is true to some women, but not to all women."

Julian stared at me. He seemed to be thinking about what I said.

"Think of it hard enough," I said slowly. "For one, Mara does not seem to fit your opinion of women."

DEAR JULIAN,

One thing that you will never ever understand is that, it really is not enough for many women to be just wives and mothers. That line of thinking is all in men's imagination. You just love to imagine that as long as you are happy, we are happy as well. That our happiness depends solely on your happiness. Son of a bitc – alright, son of a beach resort.

Sometimes I feel that I was born for the sole purpose of making your life easy, and I extremely resent that. I did not become you when I married you – why should I become you when you did not become me? Marriage is not and should never be a partnership of one.

But when I think hard about it, it's not all Julian's fault. I myself grew old in the belief that only a man would complete a woman. Of course it seemed only now that the new woman has emerged, women who recognize their most basic and inborn rights to be free, women who struggle out of their shells to liberate themselves and be their own persons. Or maybe I have just closed my eyes for such a long time, until I was compelled to wake up from my nightmare and dream about what I did not become.

But a woman does not necessarily have to be unmarried to be what she wants to be. It also depends on the kind of man she marries. Does he really know her? Does he understand her, joke with her, laugh with her, listen to her and allow her the space to grow?

It also depends on the woman. There are women who are afraid to be alone, afraid that she'd be lonely being alone, afraid to disrupt the peace in her home, to break all that she has worked hard to keep, to disappoint her children. Who cannot find it in her heart to reject the son coming home in the most ungodly hour, expecting, never doubting, that he will find his mother there to help him care for his wounded, suffering comrade. Can she unlove him, steal that sense of confidence and security from him?

It's all too late for you, Amanda; I thought bitterly. You're forty six; what rebuilding of life are you talking about? Maybe you just need to take more baths to cool your thoughts.

I NOTICED THAT Mara keeps secretly glancing at me. Maybe she wanted to talk but was too shy to open a conversation?

"Do I have dirt on my face, Mara? You've been looking at me for a while now."

She laughed softly. "No. I'm just thinking if it's okay with you that we are here."

"Here in the house?"

"Here in the movement."

I weighed my answer carefully. "I do acknowledge that… that you each have your own reason to join the movement. And if priests and nuns are with you… and even professionals... even people who could have made something big of themselves…"

"Then maybe our reasons are justified?" Mara finished the sentence for me.

"Then maybe your reasons are justified," I said.

Mara nodded slowly. A trace of sadness lined her face. "My mother cannot accept what I'm doing… while she and my father should actually be the ones who should understand me the most. After all, we belong to the working class. My mother hit the ceiling when they found out that I joined the factory union, and consequently joined the strike. She blamed me a lot when I lost my job, kept drilling into my head that my father is too old and too sickly to shoulder full responsibility to our family. That people like us are totally powerless against the owners of industries and the powers-that be. That it is a whole lot better for people to have work no matter how meager the salary, than go hungry and sleep on an empty stomach.

"Recently though, my father is at least starting to see it my way, and that of course is a most welcome development. But my mother still cannot accept me."

I was barely listening anymore, just wondering how she and Jules, two people from different backgrounds and different class origins, could have crossed the gap and be drawn to each other. But of course they share the same ideals, the same commitment, and maybe that is more than enough to build a relationship on.

"We first met when his group lent support to our strike. He taught me to sing. He involved me in his cultural group and the two of us played respective roles in a street play. We lost touch when martial law was declared but later met again in the… "

"In the underground," This time, it was me who finished her sentence.

"Yes, in the underground," she answered.

I asked whether her parents already knew about her and Jules.

"I don't know."

"You don't know?"

"It's been quite a long while since I last saw them."

"Are you and Jules married?"

"In the movement."

I never realized that the "movement" has its own wedding ceremony.

Mara at times waxes poetic to stress the need for a revolution:

"There is no such thing as a bloodless revolution. No such thing as a bloodless childbirth. Both are necessarily painful and bloody."

Julian would simply nod quietly, absorbing her words, respectful of her right to her own ideals.

"But who wants war?" He would simply say. "Bloodshed is not a good sight to imagine."

Mara, she is not afraid to answer Julian. She is not afraid to look straight into his eyes.

"The ruling class... they will never initiate real change. Even now— especially now—almost all laws favor foreign investments and industrial monopolies. "

"Well, dear... we have the Ministry of Labor to attend to the complaints of workers..."

"We also have total banning of all strikes," Mara would calmly reply.

"But when there are strikes, production goes on a standstill. Both labor and industry incur losses."

"Strikes are the single most powerful weapon of the workers."

She's intelligent and so sure of herself that I found myself envying her, wishing I possessed even a little of her determination and self-confidence.

As soon as the holiday season of '76 was over, Mara went back to her place of work. She was just entering her third trimester; but said she has an easy pregnancy and can still move around a lot, and that the struggle should not stop just because a woman is pregnant.

Jules stayed in Manila because his place of work is here. They in the movement who married each other remain married to the movement just the same, so different from the ordinary couple who find a house and live together. Their house is whichever UG house they are assigned to, which remains their house for as long as they deem it safe to stay in, or whoever among the masses opens the door for them. Their time together is not determined by the ticking of the clock where at five pm, the man closes the folders on his desk and prepares to come home. They see each other when time and security allow, find their privacy and the chance to make love if and when possible, for their love do not live in their bodies alone but also in their commitment and their ideals.

Loving, Jules has said before, *does not mean looking at each other but looking together in the same direction*. And they remain true to those words.

Even when Mara was here, Jules would sometimes be out the whole night, but Mara would simply greet him with a sigh of relief when he came home, just happy to have him back safe and sound, just grateful that he has once more evaded the danger that lurked in the shadows of the night.

I envy how their minds and hearts have become one, the full sense of security in each other, the certainty that they are bound together but still remain one with the bigger world they live in.

Commitment and dedication. This is what makes the children "on the other side of the fence", something that not everybody possesses. The complete letting go of the materialism that defines one's success in a bourgeois society.

I decided that even if they have not been good children by the prevailing standard of society, they can still become good parents to the children they are going to bring forth in this world.

"MOM, MARA has given birth!"

"Huh? When? Where? Oh, I'll get dressed... I'm coming with you!"

"They're not here, Mom. I... I haven't even seen my son yet. They just brought me the news."

I was aghast. "You haven't seen him yet? They just brought you the news?"

"I'll see him soon, Mom. I'm really very excited to see him! We named him Rev, short for revolution!"

"Jules, do you understand what you're saying? You're a father now, your wife just gave birth to your son... and it's your first child! Where were you when he was being born?"

"Mara understands that, Mom. She does not take it against me that I was not with her in her most difficult time... because she knows I'm just here!"

"What kind of father are you?"

Jules was taken aback by the vehemence in my voice. I was immediately sorry.

He stared at me, stunned. The excitement of moments ago slowly turning into pain, revealing some inner hurt that made me suddenly realize that he, and those like him, get lonely too. That life in the struggle really entails a lot of personal sacrifices, almost complete selflessness even, on their part.

"You don't know how I wished I was physically present when Mara was going through her labor pains," he said slowly. "I should have been the first to hold my son. I had to keep reminding myself over and over to be strong… to set aside my own worry… that it is for our children that we are in this struggle." His voice now coming firm and resolute. "That it is for them… that we are trying to build… a better world."

Chapter 21

ALTHOUGH THE "GODS" had led us to believe that the Philippines has long achieved its independence, the reality is that we were denied the chance to attain real progress, what with the bigger part of our military, cultural, economic, and political life remaining under the control of the United States. US multinational corporations held back the growth of our economy. Wealth obtained from our agricultural lands and natural resources dissipated in the greed of the multinationals and rich plantation owners. Big landlords continued to mercilessly seize the lands of farmers; thus, the ever-increasing number of farmers who lost their livelihood crowded the city in search of work, already flooded with hundreds of thousands of graduates who could not find employment. The struggling Philippine industries were going bankrupt and closing shop. Poverty had become a steadily growing phenomenon.

This was the situation that gave birth to the turbulent political condition towards the end of the '60s and saw the relentless mass actions held on the streets of Manila, often ending in violent dispersals by the military culminating to the loss of young lives. The collective voices of the students, workers, and farmers screaming for fundamental change in Philippine society echoed throughout the country, demanding the nationalization of American corporations that amass profits from the Philippines that they take home to their motherland resulting in the drying up of our economy. The demand also included the pulling out of the US military bases around the country that are here to protect and defend the greed and cunning of American imperialism, endangering the lives of the Filipino people in case of an invasion.

The unrest grew uncontrolled and spread nationwide, shook the status quo and used by the Marcos regime as the primary reason for declaring martial law, which the United States government wholeheartedly supported for their own vested interest: a coupling that came to be known as the "US-Marcos dictatorship."

As soon as martial law was implemented, instead of the nationalization of industries, Marcos opened the country for more foreign investments, signed into laws such generous incentives under the Investment Incentives Act that listed tax credit, tax exemption for expansion and re-investment, deduction of labor training expenses, and deduction of past losses against earnings in the succeeding fiscal year. Contractualization of workers was implemented, which took away their security of tenure and disqualified them from receiving benefits that only regular employees are entitled to, their wages kept to a minimum. To further assure the big capitalists that no disruption of their businesses would happen, forming of new unions was illegalized and strikes in vital industries banned.

Homes of informal settlers were demolished to give way to new infrastructure projects including the building of offices for incoming foreign investments. Giant dams were built to provide irrigation to big plantations and electricity to giant agribusinessess, never mind that the homes, farms and sacred graves of the indigenous people went under water and the peasants driven up the mountains toward barren and inarable lands.

The situation in the country continued to worsen. With Marcos' heavy borrowing from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, our foreign debt ballooned, resulting in the depreciation of the peso and huge increase in the prices of basic commodities. A worldwide economic crisis was taking place at the time, which the government conveniently used to excuse the increasing level of poverty and unemployment in the country.

It is not surprising then that the force that Marcos tried to silence secretly reorganized and the underground movement slowly gained control of the countryside. The years between 1972-75 witnessed the dramatic reemergence of the labor movement Despite the countless anti-people decrees issued by Marcos and the vast power of the military, some fleeting and unreported strikes took place in the corridors of the country. Workers in a sugar mill in Pampanga numbering in the thousands walked out of their jobs at the close of 1974. With the support of veteran organizers, students, and religious communities, on Labor Day '75, nine unions and several small groups of workers came together to form the Bukluran ng mga Manggagawang Pilipino (Alliance of Filipino Workers). Five months later, workers of La Tondeña Corporation, a big winery in Manila, staged a strike to demand security of tenure for the one thousand one hundred casual workers who have been with the company for five years.

Fully supported by the coalition and the multiplying number of students and religious groups who joined the picket line, the management gave in. The government could not break the strike because being a winery, La Tondeña is not considered vital industry and therefore not covered by the general order that prohibits workers from going on strike .

Presidential Decree 823 was then laid down and implemented, which now prohibits *all kinds of strikes in all kinds of industries*. The decree also prohibited extending support to unions, financial or otherwise, particularly by foreign religious groups who the government suspected as another sector cuddling the communists. Two foreign missionaries assigned in Tondo were deported. There was again mass arrest of workers, students, informal settlers and even priests and nuns.

Ironically for Marcos, instead of the people being cowed into silence, his decree gave birth to the Movement to Repeal PD 823. Universities around Manila held various symposia to clarify and oppose the decree. Workers' organizations multiplied. Even when Marcos finally gave in and repealed PD 823 with the partial lifting of the strike ban, mass actions could no longer be contained but continued to grow stronger with the participation of an increasing number of people: Labor Day '76: 3,000; October '76: 12,000; May Day '77: 20,000; September '77: 35,000; April 4 '78: 60,000.

Marcos further tried to pacify the workers by ordering companies to grant them Christmas bonuses as required by law, but the stubborn refusal of managements to comply only generated more mass actions. The early months of '76 saw the Bukluran ng mga Manggagawang Pilipino ballooned to one hundred and thirty unions with eighty thousand members and before the end of the year, four hundred strikes were carried out.

Informal settlers previously relocated to nearby provinces where there were no means of livelihood flocked back to the city and joined the founding of the Zone One Tondo Organization (ZOTO)—a federation of one hundred and thirteen organizations of the urban poor which went into alliance with other federations of informal settlers and gave birth to a super-federation renamed ZOTO-Ugnayan. They gained the support of religious sectors both in the domestic and international communities.

To quell the ever-growing radicalization of the urban poor, the government tried to address the issue and established the project Kapitbahayan -a housing project the cost of which sadly turned out to be beyond the reach of the poor. Eventually, Kapitbahayan evolved into another housing program called BLISS - which, again, catered to the middle class. The World Bank proposed a new solution: the upgrading of slum communities, which agenda again included relocation, actually to clear the vast area occupied by the informal settlers to give way to the expansion of international port facilities to accommodate further multinational investments.

Seven thousand residents have been arrested but the urban poor relentlessly continued to oppose the project. Trinidad Herrera, their president, was arrested, tortured, subjected to

electric shock and sexual indignities... and the urban poor kept on fighting.

Meanwhile, in Mindanao, the unyielding resistance of the Moro National Liberation Front, said to be in alliance with the Communist Party, was in full force. To prevent war from completely breaking out, the government went into direct negotiation with Moslem leaders. From '75 to '76, representatives of both government and the MNLF negotiated a peaceful agreement that was signed and came to be known as the Tripoli Agreement of December '76, which awarded autonomy—or political independence—to Mindanao. Although the government was able to get a few leaders and members of the MNLF to surrender, before long, MNLF and the government were exchanging military operations again.

The New People's Army, the revolutionary arm of the Communist Party, which started with only sixty members and thirty-five low caliber firearms gained strength. A year after it was established in Tarlac in '68, the army expanded to the mountains of Isabela. In '71, it was felt in Bicol and in '73, it had spread to Samar, Panay, and Negros. It reached the vast southern island of Mindanao in '74, and the government was left with no way to go but recognize its presence in thirty four provinces. Soon, the NPA had forces in all regions of the country with a total of more than twenty guerilla fronts.

The government had its hands full with enemies coming from all sides. At the same time that it was unrelenting in its effort to propagate discipline, cooperation, peaceful revolution and amnesty for surrenderees, trucks and airplanes continued to unload military troops in places where rebellion were more famously taking place. "Big fish" in the persons of Commander Dante and Jose Maria Sison were captured, but the government failed to get a whiff of any sign that its most trusted people were moving to the other side, most prominent of whom was Horacio Morales, vice president of the Development Academy of the Philippines, who defected to the National Democratic Movement exactly on the same night that he was to receive an award as one of the Ten Most Outstanding Young Men of the Philippines.

Up until this very moment that I am writing down all these, the newspapers almost always carry headlines concerning armed encounters that killed the likes of Willy. The tentacles of government continue to work tirelessly to find and capture the elements that wave the flag of bloody change. They will go on and on, as long as government refuses to see the line separating the progressive from the subversive, as long as everyone who does not side with government policies and actions are hunted down and arrested... or killed.

Chapter 22

1978. THE COMING Interim National Assembly was the burning issue of the day.

A year had passed since we last saw either Mara or Jules, when at the dead of night, we were startled by the loud pounding on the gate.

I really thought it was Jules, and he was knocking nonstop because of an emergency. It crossed my mind that my son was wounded, bleeding, dying. I almost flew to the door, behind me the equally startled Julian and Em.

But it was not Jules but uniformed men that we laid our eyes on.

One introduced the team as if their uniform were not enough for us to immediately recognize them. "PC, Ma'm," he said. Later, we would learn that all the gates around the subdivision were put under heavy guard by soldiers.

"We have a search and arrest order." In a flash, they were inside and searching, like they have all the right to our home.

We were all too stunned and nervous to resist. Julian himself was rendered speechless. He just stood by and watched the strangers desecrate our home. I was saddened by his look of helplessness, he who has always appeared to be in control.

Up until now, sometimes I still wonder what if, failing to find Jules, they took Em instead? It happened to some families. What would Julian have done? Would he fight back and die defending his son? Maybe offer himself instead? Or would he be too helpless to do anything?

The raiding team turned eveything upside down, looking under the beds, the insides of cushions, even the entrails of the TV, cassette, camera, stereo, tearing up the ceiling…

My mind was running wild: could there still be something here that we failed to dispose of? Had, by any chance, Jules left something else, some subversive material, a bullet maybe, that I was not able to throw away? I made it a point to clean up his room every time he would leave from here. But he has not come home for a year and I could not remember whether I did inspect his room the last time.

And Em... could he also be bringing home some subversive materials?

What if without warning, Jules suddenly showed up?

Oh, God, please don't. Please…

In the end, the only "subversive" things the PC found were a few copies of foreign magazines that had articles criticizing the human rights violations in the Philippines.

"Where is your son?" One asked in a demanding tone of voice."

"I don't know!" I answered irritably, consciously trying to speak in the same grouchy manner that he did. My heart was pounding but I would not give him the pleasure of seeing me afraid.

It's good that one intervened, who had better manners than the first:

"Madam, are you aware of your son's activities?"

I feigned innocence. "No. We have not seen him for a long time."

They asked whether we know one Danilo Bagawisan. That, we can all answer truthfully. "Who can that be?"

They showed us a photograph which I did not immediately recognize, until I realized it was the wounded friend Jules brought home more than a year ago. It was Rene!

"Your son is one of those identified by this person, a P.O. in the Rizal area."

"P.O.?"

"Political Officer."

Political Officer. Inspite of the situation we were all in, I felt a stirring of pride. That can be quite a respectable position!

Julian was finally able to collect himself and tried another tactic, I don't know whether to placate the raiding team or to show them that he was not afraid. "You may want to serve them coffee, Amanda?"

At least they had enough shame in them to decline.

It took a long time before the raiding team finally gave up on us. They left our house looking like it was hit by a tornado.

Both Julian and I praised the children for being cool and for not giving one wrong answer.

8 APRIL 1978

These past few days, the newspapers carried nothing but the most important issue of the year: the election in the Interim National Assembly and the president's challenge to the opposition to come up with their list of candidates.

The opposition party LABAN (Laban ng Bayan, Struggle of the People) was formed to fight it out with the government political party, the KBL (Kilusang Bagong Lipunan or New Society Movement). Most prominent on the list of the opposition party was former senator Benigno Aquino who was presently in detention. Manila came alive with banners, campaign sorties and rallies.

On the eve of the election day, the streets all around the city were suddenly overflowing with thousands of citizens, old and young alike, merging on España Street towards Mendiola, carrying banners for the LABAN party and staging an unparalleled noise barrage.

People screamed at the top of their lungs, sang songs of pre-martial law years, honked their cars, exploded fireworks, marched, ran, yelled, even banged aluminum kitchenware. Manila turned lively and scary, celebratory and chaotic, like a great mass of people joined together in the opening salvo of a war they were going to stage or the closing celebration of a battle won, where victory was the color of the night.

"Amanda, are the kids home yet?"

"Why, Julian? You're breathless!"

"Damn, it's mayhem outside! Marches are taking place all around, all going to the direction of Malacañang! I got blocked on my way home. Somebody jumped on the hood of my car, many others followed. I lost my view, they simply guided me on. I got caught in the middle of screaming, rampaging people and I could not get out! I could not make them get off my car! My God, Amanda, it's like I was in the middle of war! If those people are armed, the government will surely fall tonight!"

We heard explosions. God, Bingo is still outside! Julian, Em is not home yet! Jason, where is he?

Em! Jasoooon! Binggooo!

I wish I could say that Jules was safe wherever he was. But no place seemed to be safe anymore. Six hundred people were arrested as soon as election was over. Until two months later, back-to-back mass arrests were still going on. I wonder why the noise barrage held on the eve of election day did not seem to resonate around the world?

June 12. The military must be working harder. There are dates in the calendar when they are most active. June 12 is one of them. December 26 is another. Independence Day and CPP founding anniversaries respectively. Those are dates that the communists must be implementeng whatever program of action is on their agenda.

On the night of June 12, I felt restless and anxious for some reason I could not put my finger on. Goodness, what was I feeling so anxious about? I really should get hold of myself and drive away the negativity invading my mind.

Ten days later, I was able to finally define that restlessness and anxiety that covered my whole being on the night of June 12. Em came home from school earlier than usual and immediately put an arm around me.

"Mom, can we sit down?"

I was immediately alarmed but tried anyway to calm myself.

"There's something I have to tell you."

"Money?" I was thinking, if it were some bad news, could you just delay it for a few seconds? I am not ready to hear it.

"No, Mom. Let's sit, shall we?"

"I just rose from my chair."

"Mom," Em's voice was serious. "I want us to sit. What I will say is not good to hear."

I could not delay it anymore. I had to be ready. Right now.

And Em broke the bad news. "Kuya Jules was... *captured!*"

Chapter 23

JULES WAS CAPTURED on the night of June 12, maybe at the same time that I started having that feeling of doom, a feeling that lasted all night, the whole night that he was probably being subjected to torture. They say that the pain a child goes through always rubs off on the mother regardless of how physically far apart they are. That the golden thread that connects them remains strong and unbreakable no matter the time and distance.

Julian was quiet the whole time we were going around Camp Crame, as though the news of Jules' capture still would not completely sink in his consciousness, maybe because he did not want to imagine the torture his son must have gone through. Em and I had to do all the asking around. We were referred to a sergeant. We were referred to a lieutenant, who in turn referred us to a master sergeant. Either they were not aware of a certain Julian Bartolome Jr. being taken here or they were simply lying.

At last, an officer admitted that yes, Jules was in the camp. But that he was still under investigation, still incommunicado. Meaning, he was not yet allowed to receive visitors.

I was weak with worry and the long sleepless night and my legs were ready to crumble. I started to cry. Em wrapped his arm around me.

"Please, sir," He pleaded to the officer. "Even just for a few minutes."

The officer finally relented. He summoned for us to follow him to a one-story building ahead, an ordinary office with seats on the visiting area and one room at the end of a corridor. The officer reminded us that he was violating the rules so we have to keep the visit short or he would be in hot water. He asked a guard to go get Jules.

I could feel Julian's tension building up. He has not spoken a word all this time.

Jules finally emerged from the room at the end of the corridor. He limped badly as he walked toward us, exhibiting extreme pain with every step, his head tilted on one side like he could not hold his neck straight up. There were no visible bruises on his arms save for a few cigarette burns—the blows must have been delivered on the parts of his body that can be covered. His eyes were bloodshot and have dark circles around them. Even sitting on the bench between me and Julian seemed to require too much effort.

Later, we would find out that his lungs almost collapsed with punches and karate blows. He was also subjected to electric shocks. There on his penis. "It was so painful... I thought I would die from the pain!" They tortured him with no clothes on, made sure that every pain inflicted connected right on his skin. "They make you suffer not only physically but emotionally as well. They strip you of your dignity, almost make you hate your own body. "

He was exposed all night in a room with the air-conditioner running at extreme temperature. Maybe that's why his head was still throbbing terribly until now. He had a cold and his cough was dry.

"They told me over and over that they have captured Mara, too. And that they would kill Mara if I refused to cooperate with them. But I stood my ground. I made up my mind I would not give them the pleasure of seeing me break down."

There was pride in his voice. He met our eyes directly and I could read in his eyes that for all that he went through, he was not sorry for the path he chose to take, that the torture he underwent only strengthened his commitment to his ideals. Even Julian could see the resoluteness in his eyes. He looked at his son quietly, and then embraced him and put into that embrace the words he could not say: that they may not share the same ideals but he looks up to him for being a man of integrity and unwavering principle. And that he, too, is proud of him. I think it was the moment that father and son returned completely to each other.

As for me, when I embraced my son, I felt overwhelmed with wanting to take him back to the safety of my womb. This young man may have grown a lot taller than me, but this is still the same son I cradled in my arms and sang lullabies to. How I wished I could have exchanged places with him, took all the blows and laid down in freezing temperature. More than ever, I could feel in that moment the overwhelming helplessness of a mother. The torment and agony does not end with labor pains; giving birth is only the beginning, there are pains a thousandfold more painful than the hours of childbirth.

If only a mother could take the anguish of her child! If only she could offer him more than her tears...

"It's okay, Mom. I'm still alive, see? I'm still all in one piece!"

"It was Rene who squealed on you, right?" Em finally asked. "The PC raided our house before the elections. They showed us a picture of Rene. Told us that he identified you and revealed your activities to them."

A shadow passed over Jules's face but he still managed to smile, albeit a sad smile. "He fell into the hands of the enemies. When you are in that situation, no one can say how much you can take. Even me, there were moments when I thought I was going to give up. I had to block my mind, deleted from my mind the names and places of my comrades."

He added that he finally lost consciousness and when he came to, he was already in the infirmary.

"What about Mara? And the child?"

"Don't worry, they are in a safe place."

WE WERE ADVISED by the Task Force Detainees to petition for habeas corpus, advised by a non-government organization to make noise regarding the maltreatment Jules suffered in the military camp. They said that we should have that on the newspapers, that we should approach a group of lawyers actively defending the cases of political prisoners. But in the same breath, they also said that it would be a big risk petitioning for habeas corpus because there was this possibility that the military would instead take the case to court. Do you think the military doctor who tended to Jules would testify against those who subjected him to torture? Not on your life! They are all members of the military and they have to protect one another. Not to mention that with the horribly sluggish processing of cases in our current judicial system—both civilian and military—the case may not be taken up over the next several years, after which the detainee may actually be sentenced to several years in prison. Maybe it would be preferable to wait and hope that for some humanitarian reason, the detainee is voluntarily released by the military.

In my visits to the detention center, other than the guards that man the area, I also got to meet a few higher-ups. I find most of them kind and amiable. Lieutenant Liboro secretly allowed visitors in even if red alert was in force and visitation rights were suspended. The judge advocate general always comes back for me even if he has already boarded his car when he senses that there is something I wanted to ask or talk about. The chief of home defense unit stops and talks awhile with the families of detainees and asks about the progress of their appeal for the release of their kin.

One time, a special occasion was held at the camp where the families of military men were invited. I chanced upon Colonel Valderama with his wife and children. I saw him lift his young daughter, wiped the dirt off her face, and laughed fondly at something that the child said. He then put his arm around his teenage daughter and he projected the picture of a loving father.

I have developed a certain friendliness with Colonel Valderama because he never failed to ask how my son was doing. The kids' conditions are difficult, he would often say. Too bad they are misguided. They could have been excellent soldiers!

I decided that in case I needed help for Jules, Colonel Valderama was the first person I should approach.

But when I mentioned him to Jules, Jules sneered and said: "That man is sadistic. He was the first to beat me up, and beat me up badly! Gave me numerous karate blows. Looks to me he gets some orgasmic pleasure torturing people." He added that the colonel was also involved in the rape of two female detainees.

I cannot, for the life of me, understand the psychology of some military men. No way can I reconcile the image of a good father with that of a sadistic person. How is it possible that a man who will probably kill if someone so much as touch his child, be the same man who can inflict unspeakable cruelty to the child of another man?

I cannot fathom the workings of the mind and heart of a man, what pushes him to commit violence. Some say it's because men are trained in violence in line with their unending search for power. That maybe, if there is no power struggle among men, or at least the power struggle is kept to a minimum, weapons of destruction will not be greatly improving over time, from the arrows and spears of ancient times to bombs and chemical warfare of the modern age. The world would not have been this dangerous and people would not experience so much pain and suffering.

ON THE FOURTH month of his detention, Jules was transferred to Bicutan together with other detainees captured in other military operations. On the fifth month, I decided maybe it was now the opportune time to appeal for his release.

Madam, your son's release is not within our jurisdiction. Why don't you go to the office of National Defense?

Madam, the release of political detainees is not processed here in the office of National Defense. What you should do is write a letter to Malacañang.

Feedback from Malacañang: *Your letter has been endorsed to the Ministry of National Defense.*

Feedback from National Defense, a letter to Bicutan: *Please expedite the investigation of the case of –*

Standard responses. Vague, uncertain responses.

Soon, the year came to a close, giving way to another year.

Jules was still in detention but for security reasons, Mara has never—can never—show up at the detention center. She has long been listed in the military's line of battle.

She kept in touch though, wrote to me regularly to ask about Jules, also to give us updates about Rev. *"He is yet too young to be looking for a father but I make sure he is growing up with a deep sense of attachment to Jules. That no matter how physically far away his father is from us, we remain a family."*

She sent us a little Christmas present: a verse mounted in a glass frame made by political detainees outside Manila:

"Tranquil shores are only for those who would dare plunge into the raging waters in the deadliest of storms."

I don't know whether it was to further explain themselves to us or a way of letting us know that she has faith that we are with them in their struggle.

Meanwhile, Em's articles that carried the vaguest hint of anti-Marcos sentiment suffered left and right rejection from mainstream media. He has graduated from college and now works for a big advertising company. Here he was able to take a closer look at the great deception perpetuated by multinational companies in a consumer society. Powdered milk and canned starter foods for example, that have long taken over the place of breast milk and rake in millions of dollars in sales, actually do not contain all the nutrients essential to a growing child. Bottled soft drinks and processed food are actually mostly junk. Del Monte, Pepsi, Coke, Purefoods... haven't they become by-words in Filipino households?

How ironic, he says, that while millions of dollars are being poured in advertising for food, millions of people are starving to death.

"But all those manufactured foods are not intended for the poor," I said. "Those are intended for the rich."

As soon as I verbalized my opinion, it crossed my mind that in a big way, we who belong to the "rich" were in fact silent conspirators in the scheme of things—we who patronize the products of multinational corporations and allow them huge profits that they take out of our country, money that they later bring back to us in the form of loan, at a given interest of course, keeping us deep in debt and robbing us of real development. It is horrific to think that the interest alone on our loans runs to seventeen million pesos a day!

Wait a second... was I thinking nonsense again?

I would see the plentiful food on the table in tv commercials and think of the poor who can never ever hope to see them in real life. I would watch the healthy and beautiful kids dancing and prancing in praise of the chocolate drink that keeps them alert and wise and think of the countless children dying of hunger and disease.

I became preoccupied with different images I only read or hear about. The skinny children Mother Theresa took from the stinky drainages of del Pan. The coughing, all-skin-and-bones old people that she housed somewhere in Tondo; the pungent odor of their breaths and bodies, sweat and wounds. I wonder if the images ever touched the conscience of both government and the bishops.

I was thinking... well; everyone is gifted with the right to think anyway, the most basic freedom that no one can take away... and I cannot stop thinking that maybe... just maybe... we really need a revolution!

Chapter 24

JASON PASSED HIS senior year on the basis of his "pleasing personality" alone and pleaded with us to allow him to stop schooling for a while, until he was able to "reinvent" himself and see how he could successfully charm these college professors who wear thick eyeglasses and skirts way below the knee.

"Let him," Julian said. As usual, he abides by what Jason wants. "He's young, lots of time for him to decide what he really wants to be."

Curfew has been lifted and sometimes, Jason stayed out till the wee hours. There were also times when he spent the night at stay-in parties, which I often scolded him about.

"What's wrong with you? Are you really happier out on the streets than here at home?"

"No, madam."

"Well, you treat this house like a boarding house!"

"I do? Of course not, madam. "

This is quite subjective, but more and more, I feel as if I was losing Jason, that he was putting wider and wider distance between us. I tred to silence my concern and reasoned out that maybe it's just a phase he was going through. Some people can be late bloomers and that maybe at seventeen, he has not completely grown out of his adolescence period.

He has been giving me a hard time since Christmas. Or perhaps even before that. Even the playfullness of tone seemed to have gone out of his teasing words. Anyway, it was Christmas when he really pissed me. I told them we all have to be with Jules as it was open house and our only chance to spend a whole day with him.

"On Christmas day?" Objection was evident in his tone.

It so happened that my patience was short that day. "Who the hell wants to spend Christmas in a stockade?" I almost screamed at him. "If I could only take your *kuya* home instead of bringing the whole family there!" I must have went on and on. "If you want to stay behind, by all means, do as you please! You always do as you please anyway!"

He went with us but barely said anything the whole day.

Later, I found out from Bingo that Jason had promised his girlfriend that he would drop by their house on Christmas day. The girl was supposed to introduce him to her family. That he stood them up created a rift between them. She refused to listen to his explanation and instead broke up with him.

Bingo said Jason was devastated because he was really in love with the girl.

"She is his first love, Mommy," Bingo said softly, sounding like he was trying to convey to me, make me understand, the heartbreak Jason was going through. I wonder if Jason did not shed a few tears when he shared his feelings to his younger brother?

I felt guilty. But then, what can I do? He did not explain his situation to me.

But how could he have explained his situation to me when I was flying off the handle? I would not have listened anyway.

I did plan to apologize to Jason but he was always out of the house. So later I just let it go. Mostly because I was more preoccupied with how I could make him come home early enough. Night after night, I waited. The longer I waited, the angrier I got. But all the more he stayed out late like he was actually avoiding me, perhaps afraid that I was waiting for some opportunity to give him some tongue-lashing.

In the end, I got tired of waiting up and went to bed when I felt like it.

Until one night, I was wakened by the persistent ringing of the phone.

It was a boy calling. "Hello, ma'am?"

"Yes, who is this?"

"Ronnie."

He's a friend of Jason. I asked sleepily, "Yes, Ronnie. What's the matter? It's three in the morning."

"Sorry, ma'am, I'm just feeling uneasy. How's Jason?"

That made me instantly awake. "Jason?"

"Have you got him, ma'am?"

Fear gripped me. "Got him? What do you mean, 'got him'? Wait, let me check his room!"

I laid the receiver down and went to check on Jason. The room remained exactly the same as it was when he left that day. There was no trace of him having come home.

I got back on the phone. "Hello? He's not here, Ronnie. Where is he?"

"Ma'am, I heard that Jason has been arrested by the police."

"*Whaaaattt?*"

"I think they found marijuana in his bag. I just don't know which precinct he was taken to."

IN NO TIME at all, Julian and I were making the rounds of the police stations. The first two turned out negative. On the third, a middle-aged desk sergeant told us that in his experience, some youths when apprehended gave fictitious name. One, because they do not want their parents to find out and two, so that in case they need to get a police clearance, the record of their arrest would not appear on it.

He asked if Jason carried an ID. I said I am not sure.

"Better take a look in the cell. Do you still recognize your son?" I don't know whether he was just making us smile or insinuating that we have been neglecting our son.

The men inside the cell all looked hardened criminals to me. Their bodies muscled, their arms and legs covered with tattooes. I cringed at the thought of Jason being in the company of these men.

Back in the car, I mentioned to Julian that maybe we should go back to the first two police stations and ask if we could also take a look in their cell.

"Let us just go to the other precincts first," he said. "If he's still not there, then we'll go back to the first two."

We found Jason's name in the logbook of the next precinct.

"But we have already released him," said the desk sergeant and asked another cop to show us Jason's release paper.

There it was, properly documented and acknowledged... Jason's signature indeed at the bottom of the release paper.

"What time did you release him?" Julian asked.

"It's clearly stated there, sir; shortly before midnight, just after the initial investigation. That's our procedure. If we don't find any evidence to pin down a person, we release him immediately. We don't want to be charged with illegal detention."

We rushed back home. Released before midnight, and it was 3am when I last checked his room. I was feeling cold all over, hoping against hope that Jason came in just after we have left.

But Jason was still nowhere in the house.

"Darn it!" Julian exclaimed. "That kid probably knows we have found out and is now afraid to come home! He sure deserves a beating for making us go through all these!"

Until six o' clock struck, Jason still has not shown up. Julian decided to skip office. His anger has long dissipated and his face was now lined with worry. He paced the floor and chain-smoked.

"See if you could find some address book in his stuff so we can call his friends. There could be someone who knows where he is." He was trying to convince himself that Jason was simply hiding in a friend's house, afraid to come home.

I looked among Jason's stuff for some phone book, wondering if it were possible that Jason was also somehow afraid of Julian. Maybe it was more because he didn't want to hear me out?

He should have known too well that whatever happens, we are always here for them. In fact, he should have called us while he was still in the custody of the police.

"Ronnie? Hello, Ronnie? Jason's Mom here."

"How's Jason?"

"That's precisely why I called. The police said they have released him... but he still has not come home."

"Oh."

"Don't you have any idea where he could have gone?"

"I'll try to call the others, Ma'm. Then I'll call you back."

We tried the other names on Jason's list, but none of them has heard from Jason either. None of them had seen him since last night. In fact, none of them was around when he was arrested, they just heard about it from people who happened to be there. When Ronnie called back, it was only to say that all their friends were also in the dark about Jason.

Julian spoke to Ronnie, too: "Just one question, Ronnie, and I want you to be honest with me, okay?" Pause. "You said they caught Jason with marijuana. Where did he get it?" Pause. "I see. Do you know any of Jason's possible connections with, say... people who sell drugs?" Pause. "You sure?" And after a deep sigh, "Okay, Ronnie. Thank you."

As he hanged up the phone, Julian answered the question in my eyes:

"He doesn't know anything."

Em came home during his lunch break. I have never seen him smoke this many cigarettes. He was terribly worried about Jason, too.

"I won't go back to the office for now," he said. "I'll go to Jason's other friends."

Julian decided to go too; even not knowing where to start. I would find out later that they went in separate directions. Julian came home at a little past five, looking terribly exhausted, told me that mostly, he just drove around hoping to find Jason in some street, looked inside fastfood restaurants where young people usually hang out, even tried a couple of hospitals in the area and finally went back to the police station nearest our house to report Jason as missing. At seven, he wanted to look again but I suggested that he take a rest, and that we should just wait for Em. The truth is, what I wanted more was for him to keep me company.

Em was still not back at nine. Ten o' clock and he was still not here. I was getting angry. I'd been crying the whole day and I could not stop.

"We are already so worried about Jason, and he's compounding it?" I just had to let out steam. "What kind of children do we have here?"

I could see Julian trying hard not to break down. "Now, Amanda, hold it, please. Just because Jason is missing doesn't mean that Em will go missing, too!"

"But doesn't he think!..."

"Ssh! Just calm down!" Finally losing his composure, desperation creeping loud and clear in his voice. "Please, Amanda! For God's sake... *pleeeease!"*

Chapter 25

JULIAN WENT OUT again on the pretext that he had to gas up, but although the gas station was just a short drive away, it took all of one hour and a half before he came back, so I knew he went around again searching for Jason. Em finally showed up just as the clock strikes 12. One look at his face and I knew that nothing came out from the many hours he looked for Jason, that he has given up and had a few drinks before finally heading home. Which made me somewhat peeved because he knew we have been waiting!...

"Em?..."

He brushed aside my attempt to ask him and asked instead: "Where's Dad?"

"He also just got here. Jason is still not here, Em."

Just then, Julian came out from the library eager to hear some news. Em went straight to Julian and put his arm on his shoulder, quietly leading him back to the library. I felt both alarmed and left out.

I broke the unwritten rule in this house that no one should eavesdrop on private conversations. I followed them, carefully stood in front of the closed door. I was barely breathing. Could Jason be locked up inside some police precinct again? Could he have been kidnapped and now the kidnappers are demanding millions of pesos in ransom that we cannot afford?

It seemed to me that Em was sobbing but the sound was too suppressed and too faint so I was not sure. It could just be the whirr of the air-conditioner. Then, almost just a split second later, I was startled by the sudden breaking of glass that seemed to have been violently hit by a hard object.

"Dad, don't!"

I pushed the door open. The bookshelf was still swaying although slowly steadying itself. Em was holding Julian in a tight embrace, dragging him away from the splinters of the shattered glass. Blood was oozing from Julian's tightly clenched fist.

"Julian, Em! What happened?"

"Fuck theml! *Fuck theeeemm!"*

Julian was wailing loudly and Em was wailing loudly and it took several seconds before I was able to comprehend what happened:

"He was found dead, Mom! He was found dead!"

My heart stopped. My head pounded so hard it felt like it was going to explode. "Who, Em? For God's sake, Em, who?" As if there was a chance he could be talking about some other person!

"Jason!"

I heard someone scream a bloodcurdling scream. The world was spinning, crashing down on me!

"Mommy! Mommy!"

Chaos. Faces taking flight. I held on, I fumbled. Hold me! Don't let me go! I'm falling!

Darkness. Endless darkness.

THERE CERTAINLY has been many cases of salvaging happening around the city and the suburbs. Rumor has it that it stemmed from the murder of two policemen in Zaragosa, Tondo. They say the police are taking revenge, killing holduppers and suspected drug users left and right. Others say that it is a desperate move by those in power to stem the worsening cases of drug addiction, snatching, holdup, murder, and other crimes. Great, some say. So that those criminals will be wiped out and maybe, peace and order will finally prevail. They cannot seem to comprehend the fact that as long as poverty and injustice prevail, criminality will also prevail.

It seems justice has become a thing of the past. Whether you're guilty or not of any crime does not matter. They want to kill you, they kill you. That seems to be the new normal.

Em admitted that he was already assailed by a feeling of dread that morning, which he tried to shake away. But when he came home that noon and found out that Jason still had not come home, he knew he had to face the possibility that the worst had happened. But of course he could not tell either Julian or me to prepare ourselves for the worst possible scenario.

So he ran the errand on his own, bringing along a close friend.

They searched the hospitals. Maybe there's a chance Jason just had an accident? Maybe there's a chance he was still alive. Never mind even if the accident was serious as long as he was still alive.

No, Jason was not in any hospital. They have already searched all the hospitals in the city. He was getting scared by the moment, broke down at one point, but finally admitted that the only places left to try are the morgues. His friend remained by his side, sharing his fear all the way, clinging to the last thread of hope.

Way past office hours, they finally tried the NBI. The guard said yes, the naked body of a young man was brought in just that afternoon. Retrieved from a garbage bin in a dark thicket somewhere in the vicinity of UP. The guard said the NBI had already taken his picture and prepared a press release. It will be in the papers tomorrow.

Em just could not come home right away because he had yet to summon the courage to tell us. He and his friend had to have a few drinks until he felt he was ready to face us. His friend wanted to come with him but he insisted that he went home as well.

THE AUTOPSY revealed the many stab wounds that Jason sustained, seventeen in all. Some went right through his lungs, some pierced his heart. There were marks of wires tied around his wrists, his arms and elbows skinned, his thighs and knees ripped open, his testicles smashed.

They stripped my Jason of his clothes and dragged him face down. It was a ghastly and brutal murder they did to my Jason.

For the life of me, I could not accept what happened to my son!

I was dry-eyed when I narrated the story to Jules. I could not even bring myself to cry anymore. The only thing I could feel was the morbidity of Jason's death and the burning hatred in my heart for people whose names and faces I could not even draw in my mind.

Jules was allowed to come to Jason's wake. He came accompanied by two military guards who courteously moved away to give us the privacy of the moment. They were not even in uniform.

Gani also flew home from the states, and how greatly he has changed. He is better-built now, he looked more manly, and now has confidence in the way he carried himself.

"Salvaged," Em said. Even he could not believe it.

Jules bit his lip tightly. Gani's eyes were burning with fury.

"Salvaged," Julian repeated, and I feared that he might suddenly break down. "But by whom?"

Em exploded. "Is there anyone else who would do this? He came from the custody of the police!"

"Em," Julian calmly interrupted. "Jason signed a release paper."

He was trying to temper both his emotion and those of his family, trying to remain rational and not in any way stoke the anger burning in the hearts of his sons. One can feel as murderous as he wants but all the anger is too general at this point; no particular name, no particular face, to direct that anger to.

"Before they released Jason... if they had released him in good faith, they would have called you and released him in your custody! You would be asked to sign a statement that you got him alive!"

Julian shook his head. "Jason is not considered a minor anymore, Em. In that case, parents are not needed," and at Em's attempt to open his mouth again, "We can not accuse anyone. We have no one to pin this on... we cannot make accusations."

I felt so much pity for Julian in his effort to calm down his children, despite the raging of his own emotions, too.

True, Jason's arrest was listed in the police logbook, but his subsequent release was also listed and properly documented. The question is, what could have happened after he walked out of that police station? Did he walk out of there alone, or was he accosted by some police—some evil characters?

"This is also very difficult for us, Madam," whined the same desk sergeant we have talked to before. "How would we defend ourselves if we become suspects here? My God, I wonder how we would be able to face that!" And I caught myself peering into his face, peering into the face of every cop surrounding us for a shadow, even the faintest shadow, of guilt.

A morning paper did run an item about Jason's murder, mentioning that what happened immediately followed his capture and subsequent release by the police. A simple statement. Carefully phrased so as not to have any hint of accusation.

"I want to take this to higher authorities, Julian. If we can, let's approach even Enrile," In the deep of night after Jason's burial, I wept as I bared my heart open to Julian.

"What will you tell him?" Julian asked. "That your son was captured, set free, and then murdered?"

"Isn't that exactly what happened?"

"And you're going to say, policemen did it?"

"Who else?"

"Which policemen?"

"I don't know! That's why they should investigate, look for whoever they are!" I was howling now. "That's why they should help us... because we do not know!"

Julian fell silent. I thought he was not going to speak anymore. Because he is a man and he is averse to dramatic outbursts. Because it's not proper for a man to show too much emotion. When all of a sudden, a kind of sound escaped from his throat. That turned into a sob. That turned into a wail.

"You have no idea..." The timbre of his voice was heartbreaking. How his breath got tangled was heartbreaking. "I desperately want to avenge my son, too. Fuck them, they killed my son! Fuck them all, 'Manda, fuck them all! Why did they kill my son!"

And he broke into uncontrollable sobs, his whole body trembling. Such a pitiful sight for a man who used to be so dignified and so arrogant. He was breaking down, his whole being shaking. He had completely lost his masculine pride and became every inch just a father.

**note: Enrile was then the minister of National Defense*

Chapter 26

JULIAN AND I went the rounds of every government office hoping to find one that could help solve Jason's murder: the police, the NBI, the Department of National Defense, even asked some journalists to play up the case in the hope that the authorities would be compelled to take action.

The authorities did conduct an investigation, invited a few persons of interest. But after giving us a little of their time, Jason's case was listed and archived as one of thousands of unsolved cases in the police department.

The autopsy report did not say that Jason was into drugs. So what could have been the reason for the police, or anyone for that matter, to kill him, and in such a brutal manner?

Can it be possible that there was someone out there holding a grudge against him, someone who, for whatever reason, hated him so much or maybe feared him so much and got him killed to silence him forever?

I will never know. Night after night, guilt haunted me. That there were so many things about Jason that I did not know. That I had been so focused on Jules that I have neglected my other sons.

Could it be that Jason felt extremely jealous of my attention to Jules? Did he think that I loved his brother more than I loved him? Jason, my son; it's not that I love your brother more than I love any of you... it is just because I felt he needed me most!

Jason, can you hear me? Your brother needs me and that's all there is to it! Do you understand? I thought that there's no need for me to scream it out loud, that of course, I love you as much!

"AMANDA?"

I opened my eyes. Julian's silhouette was painted in the dark. He has just come home, still dressed in his office clothes, standing beside the bed.

Two o' clock in the morning, says the luminous green hands of the clock on the dresser.

"You just came in," I said; part question, part statement, part accusation.

Julian ignored my question. "You've been this way every night. Are you going to spend the rest of your life crying?"

I felt confused. I thought I was already asleep. Jason keeps haunting me even in my dreams.

Julian sat on his side of the bed, his back to me, and slowly took off his shoes.

I did not pursue my question. But he explained anyway. "I had a few drinks with some friends."

He lay down. I caught the scent of liquor on his breath.

"You've been drinking almost every night," I said softly.

"Better drink than spend the night punishing myself," he said curtly.

"It's my son they killed, Julian!"

"He's also my son. But I keep in mind that I still have other children."

"That does not make it any less painful. Whether the boy you lose is an only child or one of many, the pain is just as much." I was getting emotional and I could not control the torrent of words. "My Jason is Jason. He is not Jules, he is not Gani or Em or Bingo! Bingo cannot take Jason's place in my heart, just as Jason cannot take the place of Bingo! Is that so difficult to understand? Each of them is his own person, a child of mine! Help me, Julian... please!"

But Julian only stared at the ceiling. He took a deep sigh. "We have to learn to accept his death," he said simply.

People say time heals all wounds, and I really hope that in due time, I will be able to come to terms with my son's death. I try to find comfort in knowing that I was not the first mother—and certainly not the last—whose child died in the hands of criminals. If those mothers learned to live with and accept their tragedies, I hope someday I will, too.

Yes, I'm still alive, but I keep asking myself just what kind of society this is.

One day I received a letter from Mara:

"I heard what happened, but I could not come to the wake. At least Jules was allowed to come. Mom, my heart is also breaking. And I'm screaming in silence... that the day of retribution must come!"

And I found myself wishing Mara was here. Only a woman can truly appreciate the heart of another woman. She never spoke to me as if I were just her mother-in-law... she always spoke to me as a friend would. And I sure needed a friend.

One day, Evelyn came to visit me:

I told her that Gani has already left.

"I know, Mom," she said. "He came to the house to say goodbye. Besides, I did not come here for him. I came here for you." She laid her hand on mine. Then she held it tight. "How are you, Mom?" her voice was full of concern.

At first, I felt awkward with her holding my hand. I was not used to the feel of another woman's hand. Perhaps it was because there are no women in my life. Or because they take it the wrong way when two women hold hands, or when two men hold hands. Who *they* are, I have no idea.

I could not help crying at Evelyn's consoling voice, at her concern, and she felt even more in touch with me and she embraced me and I wept on her shoulder. I was weeping and she was weeping and although there were no more words between us, we felt very connected. We are two women, and we are both mothers.

Days passed, our lives continued. With Julian and I, husband and wife, steadily running out of things to say to each other; Em in his world of the written word, Bingo fast growing into his own man and Jules, still in detention but happily, whose heart and mind remained free.

THE POLITICAL DETAINEES have long laid down a list of demands to the military: to free a female comrade who has given birth in detention, to put an end to the practice of solitary confinement, to release the priests and nuns hauled to jail in the latest round of mass arrests, and against the military's banning of religious groups on suspicion that they are bringing the political prisoners not only food and medicine but also news of continuing military abuses and plans of the revolutionary forces. Tension resulting from the military's continued inaction on the demands came to a boil. One day without warning, the guards shut down the gates on the detainees' visitors.

Why? the visitors asked one another. What happened? The guard explained that red alert was on. "We have a bit of a problem inside," he said. "Your kids are on a hunger strike. They have so many demands, but only the Ministry of National

Defense, not us, is in the position to grant them. Especially your son, madam," he explicitly specified me. "He's too indomitable!"

News of the hunger strike made it to the papers. Just a little item in the inside pages in the beginning, then a small item below the headline concerning the military trial of Commander Dante, Jose Maria Sison, and Jose Luneta. Then another group of prisoners joined the hunger strike. Then another. In the week between Christmas and New Year, political prisoners in various detention centers got involved. The red alert remained all through out. Soon the church was speaking about it, and it made it on the newscast, on the front pages of the dailies, and even in foreign media. The government was finally forced to examine the issues closely. After a while, the government made a compromise: the woman who gave birth in detention was released "on humanitarian grounds"; the gates were reopened for a few religious members who "passed" the "screen test"; a formal case was filed against the priests and nuns who were arrested, and except for the bigger catch, most were allowed to post bail. Some in solitary confinement were taken back to regular cells, although those considered dangerous remain isolated.

Red alert was finally lifted and the visitors allowed to enter. I broke down in tears when I saw Jules. He has lost so many pounds and has become all skin and bones. He said the military doctor has already attended to him and advised him not to eat anything for a while except milk and biscuits; that his stomach needed to readjust. Otherwise, it might reject the food and it will cause him to throw up.

"You're all crazy," I said, sobbing. "You know too well that if you get malnourished, your brains will become weak. If your brains become weak..."

One of them quickly interjected: "...the revolution might not succeed!"

And the rascals even had the nerve to burst into laughter and give one another a high five!

Chapter 27

1980

JOY CONTINUED TO elude me as year '79 turned to '80. If there was something I could acutely feel, it was the growing fear of the years continually being added to my life, the fast emptying of days that were not within my power to stop.

Emptiness. That in the twenty-seven years of being a wife, I did not fully grow as a person. I gave birth and became a mother and that's it, nothing creative followed. Somewhere along the way, I lost me. like I just disappeared. I simply became observer to Julian's quest for fulfillment, a proud albeit silent witness to the kids growing up and discovering their respective paths and finding their own directions.

No one ever bothered to ask me about myself and my own aspirations. Even I myself do not know what else I could have become, or still wanted to become, other than being a wife and mother.

I often find myself taking a long, hard look at myself and reviewing the role I continue to play to this day... would I die without ever finding the answers to my own questions to quell my own restlessness? Sometimes I would scold myself for belittling the role I played: *Being wife and mother is also a career, Amanda; one that not all women succeed in!* But like the devil, another side of my consciousness would answer back: *Where is the success?*

Julian will still be Julian even if he married someone else. Jules became an activist not because I happened to be his mother—the many injustices he saw in society molded him into one, not by anything he learned from me.

Gani is in the States out of his own accord. Em's passion for writing is completely his own, not borne out of any creative endeavor that I may have implanted in his mind.

And Jason... what can I say about Jason?

Nothing. Except that even as a mother, I somehow failed.

What am I then? What else could I have become?

I would see the wrinkles staring at me in the mirror and I would feel scared. Bingo is already a teenager and that means I am old indeed. The thought scares me. I'm turning fifty and it might be only a matter of time before I would lose my bodily coordination and become an invalid. Soon I would be gone. It scares me to think that one day, I would leave this earth without leaving any significant mark, without having done anything. People would talk in my wake and they would say: she was a wife and mother and nothing more. She hasn't done anything in this world except bear children.

I would leave this life without discovering what else I could have been, without people completely knowing who I am, what I am. Because I myself do not know who I am, what I am. I feel so alienated even from myself.

I am often alone in the house now and more and more, I feel like I am completely disappearing from the lives of these men who have always been everything in my life. Can they still see me?

In my desire to amuse myself, I often find myself talking to myself, creating scenarios in my mind, turning sad beginnings to funny, if not happy, endings.

I will breath my last and I will leave these men... that's the beginning. Where do I go from there: will it be somewhere up or somewhere down? I am not quite sure. That is yet for another man to decide. I will have to report to either of two men, kings of their respective kingdoms. Best to choose the man up there, the one that we call God, face him in the morning of judgment day, and maybe the first thing he would ask me is, "Who are you?"

That will surely be another blow on my ego, that this man with an infinite power to know everyone and everything would not even know my name! It's like I did not really exist. "Amanda Bartolome, sir."

"You see!" God will immediately sound irritated. "You don't even know your name! Bartolome is *not* yours, my dear... that belongs to Julian."

And I will suddenly be speechless. I have totally forgotten about that. He's right, I wasn't born a Bartolome. Only Julian and our children are the real Bartolomes, me not included. Dead as I am, I can still feel the feeling of unbelonging to the family I left behind.

God will become impatient with me. "You haven't answered. I said, what's your surname?"

But I've forgotten my own surname a long time ago. It has been reduced to just a letter and a period between Amanda and Bartolome. As far as my family is concerned, I am Amanda Bartolome.

God will look really annoyed now. "Are you going to answer or not? I'll make you leave if you don't!"

And I will still be wracking my brain trying to recall the surname I was born into. I have to think fast, find a way out of this predicament.

I will finally be able to find an answer. Impertinent as it may sound, it is the most truthful and heartfelt answer I can come up with. "Is a person's name really important? Whether I'm Amanda or Gloria or what, they just gave me that name when I was born, I was not born into it. My surname could be Bartolo or Cruz or Santos but whatever... it is still one surname that I simply got from my father which my father also got from his father. By the way, why is it that children always carry the father's surname? Why is the mother's surname completely ignored all the time?"

God will become thoughtful but will finally find an answer to that. "Well...that's the way it is. To be considered an official human being, you need to take the surname of your father. It's a man's world."

That, will irritate me big time! It's like I'm still talking to Julian! "But who knows," I will retort. "I might not even be the biological child of my father! I might be the child of my mother by another man. Therefore, I don't even have the right to be a Bartolo or Cruz or Santos... maybe I should have been a Reyes or Castro or Aquino!"

"Hey, hey," God will cut in. "What's the big idea, you spreading gossip around here?"

"It's not a matter of spreading gossip..."

But God will already be pointing a finger at me. "In your mother's time, no woman ever had a child by a man other than her husband, understand?"

"That's a very subjective way of thinking, sir. It's only that in my mother's time, no woman would *admit* that she had a child by another man. That's why old people say time was better back in the day. But the truth is, women of today are just simply more honest."

God will look puzzled, will become more thoughtful, then will nod up and down, up and down, rubbing his chin. "Now," he will finally concede, "that will be my thought for the day."

Which will embolden me to say more. "Come to think of it. Maybe even you also think that women of the olden days had no sexual fantasies, am I correct?"

God will turn red with embarrassment, will stammer, will grope for words. I suspect that for a while there, he would want to pretend that the phrase "sexual fantasies" is alien to him, that these things do not exist in the minds of the gods. Or could it be that the mere mention of the phrase stirs his mind, makes him think about sex, that he possibly never had since time immemorial? Oh, God. Gods lives could be so deprived and lonely, too! "Now, lady, what we're talking about here is just *your* name!"

I will take a deep breath and show him a bad case of exasperation. "It's so difficult to make you understand, sir. What I am trying to say is, a person's name is not all that important. What should count is the kind of person that she is."

"And what kind of person are you, may I ask?"

"That's what I've been meaning to demand an explanation from you all this time. You did make me a person yet you made me a *no-kind* of person. You deprived me of a mind of my own. I have no talent, no power. I know nothing!"

God will shake his head and smile his most mischievous smile ever. "Tsk tsk. That's quite unfair to say. Because there's also something you know."

"No, nothing."

"Yes, you do."

"What is it then?"

"You know that you know nothing."

I decided right then and there that if God is like Julian, I will fight death to the end of my life. I don't want to die and be with him forever. Not over my dead body!

IT'S 1980 AND even Julian has lost much of the handsomeness of youth. His hair has streaks of gray now and there are instances of noticeable sluggishness in his steps and movements. He has definitely looked older since we lost Jason. He never regained his fire, his face did not light up like before but remained lined with grief and defeat.

He is indeed looking old and lacking energy. Sometimes I can not help conjuring in my mind images of us not too far into the future: he in a wheelchair, me attending to him hand and foot.

I will tell myself off again: don't be so sure. By some streak of fate, it could be you in a wheelchair instead of him.

Well, then... he would simply hire someone to take care of me. Because he will think it so unmanly for a man to tie himself down to some very wifely duty. Besides, he sure has more important things to do.

I am becoming more and more obsessed with the desire to have a life away from Julian.

ONE DAY WHILE I was preparing to visit Jules, Julian suddenly mentioned Mara.

"If only she were not as obstinate as your son, she would not be in hiding now. It would be her taking care of her husband instead of you."

"If she did not share Jules' commitment to his cause, she would not be his wife." I answered. "Or even if they did get married, they would end up separating just the same."

"Hah! What do you call their relationship anyway? Aren't they already separated even long before Jules was captured?"

"Not in the same way as the others. They are apart physically but close in spirit. Unlike some couples who stay together but remain apart."

Julian stared at me hard and long. Did I sound like I was insinuating something?

"Would have been much better if couples are together...and close! What do you think?"

I shrugged. "It takes two for two people to be close."

"Correct."

"They should be able talk to each other... really open up to each other."

"About what?"

"About their feelings."

"A man does not talk much about his feelings," Julian said, and I suddenly wondered if it looks like we are finally talking to each other!

"But there are certain feelings a woman wants to talk about."

"Well, may I know what your feelings are?" Julian challenged, and a trace of annoyance now lined his face.

Sadness engulfed me. This is definitely not the kind of "opening up" that I have always longed for.

The disquiet that has been swelling inside me for years had culminated. He was asking me and the answer was breaking free from my chest. Maybe our moment of truth has finally come.

I shocked Julian with my next words:

"I want a separation," and I went cold all over for having said it at last.

For a long while, Julian gaped at me in astonishment. As if I suddenly sprouted two heads.

He stammered, looking for words to say.

"W-what the...c-can you repeat what you said, Amanda? I don't understand!"

I said it again. "I want a separation... end things with you. I want out."

He struggled harder to find words to say. "I...ahh...w-what... b-but... Why? My God, Amanda, what's happening to you? Are you not feeling well or something?"

I wanted to laugh at the look on his face. I shook my head. "No," I said. "I feel good. Truth is, I've never felt this good for a long long time. I've been meaning to tell you that a long time ago. I've wanted to do it a long long time ago."

Julian laughed. A loud, hysterical laugh. "Haha! Come on, Amanda, you don't mean that! When a woman wants to end things with her husband, she doesn't say it! She just leaves!"

I got mad. I raised my voice. ""A woman leaves only if she does not mean it! When all she wants is to make her husband wonder, follow her, chase her, plead with her to come home! When she just wants to get her husband's attention!"

Julian laughed harder. "Hahaha! Honey, you did it! You got my attention! You even floored me! Now, what we're talking about is feelings, right? Tell me how you really feel! Your birthday is coming, you want a party? You want jewelry?"

The color of his face was changing, reddening, getting angrier by the second:

"Do you want me to take you out, take you to a night club, a hotel?"

He banged the table with his clenched fist. The basket I filled with food for Jules shook with the impact.

"Amanda, you know that I don't like mind games!"

He was now yelling in anger:

"If you have something to say to me, say it to me without playing games like a child!" He threw his hand and hit the basket of food, basket and contents flying in all directions, plates shattering against the walls. "Goddamn it!"

Thank God, the kids are not home, I thought.

Silence. Julian's fiery eyes were on me. I looked straight at him and said softly, "I'll pack my things," and turned toward the stairs.

Chapter 28

AS I PACKED my clothes, it dawned on me that although I had so many times imagined being on my own, I was so unprepared finally taking the step to leave my home. I tried to concoct in my mind where I will go, what I am going to do. One step at a time it should be. I will take a cab, I will tell the driver to take me to a hotel. From there, I will call the kids to explain. I will tell them, their father and I ended our relationship. They will be shocked but I will tell them to keep it cool. They will ask why but I will simply say that sometimes, things just turn out the way they do. Not enlightening enough of course. But no more groping for the right words to lessen the impact. They're grown ups, they can handle this. I don't need to explain everything to them anymore. I, too, am entitled to be silent when I want to. Or when I cannot find the right words.

How much money do I have? Not much but that's okay. I won't ask Julian for any amount of money. I won't ask him for anything. So what if I start out with nothing? I would love to face that challenge of me starting out with nothing.

I will look for a job. If I don't find one, maybe I'll just look for a new husband. I don't know. Que sera sera. Whatever will be will be.

The bedroom door opened. No one would come in here without knocking except Julian. He stood motionless at the door for a while before coming in. He came in carefully, sat carefully on the bed.

I moved my suitcase to give him a wider space.

"Okay," he began. "Maybe I'm a bad husband."

I wanted to say that I never said that. But better not to repudiate it. Let him think that he's a bad husband.

"But you have changed too, Amanda. You have changed a lot."

This made me freeze. I have?

"You seem... you seem to have lost your feelings for me."

I laughed. I finally answered. "It's not that I have lost my feelings for you... it's just that I finally discovered my feelings for me." Wow. Deep.

I continued folding my clothes.

I noticed that he was watching me intensely. Confused, calculating, wondering.

I finally faced him. "What I mean is... I'm done being just your doormat. Somebody to hand you your slippers, to make you coffee. I lost myself in the process of doing all that, I became a no-kind of person. Except just a mother. Just your wife ever since. Someone you demand to strip off her clothes when you want to, someone you demand to lie in bed with you when you want to, to do it with when you want to!" I broke down in tears. My God, these are the things that I should not be saying! "Why not when I want to?"

Julian's mouth fell wide open. So confused, mouth so wide open.

And then he said, in a voice so soft and unbelieving:

"I thought you were happy."

"Well, I too, thought I was happy!"

"Even me. I thought I was happy."

It was my turn to be stunned. It's a tie?

Taking a deep breath, Julian rose. "I thought we could still get back together. But if not, then fine. Go. Suit yourself. It's a woman's world, too."

He headed for the door. He looked ready to leave.

"What do you mean, you thought we could still get back together? We haven't separated yet!"

Turning back to me, Julian smiled sadly. "We have separated, Amanda. A long time ago. We're just together in the same house but we have been so far away from each other for a long time now."

I could not understand. I gasped, almost dramatically.

Julian laughed. A sad and bitter laugh. "I tried to accept what you are. Convinced myself that there's nothing I can do. I just. Really. Can't do. Anything! Any other way to you other than the most standard way of 'doing it' as you call it. Because if I change my style, you will feel insulted. You will say, I'm treating you like a whore!" I started to answer but Julian pointed his finger at me and said sternly: "Now don't you dare interrupt me! You're too conservative! You're too inhibited! Have you ever taken time to think of how I feel about all that? Believe me, Amanda, I'm not happy with it either! Especially when I feel that it's like work that you want to get over and done with at the fastest time possible!"

"Oh my God, Julian! If you only knew how I captioned it... 'The Rabbit'!"

Julian glared at me. "What do you mean, 'The Rabbit'?"

"'The Rabbit'. Because that's how quick rabbits do it!"

Julian turned red in anger, suddenly turned his back, and I almost jumped out of my skin at how hard the door slammed.

I did not leave. It occurred to me that I really have a lot to talk about with my scoundrel of a husband!

AND JULIAN AND I indeed talked, covering both the serious and the inane: from the issue of me handing his slippers to the brewing revolution, from the love lives of movie stars to the love lives of rabbits and monkeys and dogs. From Jules down to Bingo, from Jason's birth to Jason's death...

"I thought I would not survive that," Julian admitted. "My guilt was so horrible."

"Your guilt?" I asked, confused. "Come on, Julian; I thought it was my guilt! Because I was not able to give him as much time as I gave Jules."

"No," Julian argued. "My guilt. That I spoiled him too much. He could have used a little discipline. God knows how much I loved that boy."

"I know. You loved him the most."

"Maybe. But I want you to believe..."

"That?..."

"That of course I love Jules, too. It is just that I could not reach him. He is too far away from me... like we are so disconnected."

And from here on, the nights when Julian overstayed either in the office or in the library became few and far between and instead, he asked about Jules, listened to my stories of paying a visit to this and that high government official trying to find a soul who can help him walk free.

Sometimes, we would leave the children for a while to enjoy a local or foreign singer's concert, or stroll around historical places out of town, or even to simply try the food in a coffee shop at the far end of Mabini that has a unique and funny name.

Little by little, my fears were calmed. Julian and I have crossed that distance that separated us for so long and because I am enjoying our new togetherness, I no longer dwell on the questions that used to bug my mind.

"You're looking so much younger, Amanda," and now it's not just Jules and Em who noticed but women friends as well. "Why, is Julian finally going straight?"

Such a deadly question! It scared me. What did she mean, going straight?

"Goodness, I should not be telling you this, but Lucio and I often argue about you two. You know Lucio; just because he's a man, he sides with his male friends. My stand remains that you are a very good wife for Julian to even do that.... especially now that your children are grown ups. I warned Lucio that if ever I hear about him womanizing then he gets out of my house pronto! In case he has forgotten, it's my house we're living in!"

Words like these that carried so heavy an implication are the kind that can shatter a woman's world.

Chapter 29

BUT I THINK I have grown up a lot these past few weeks, became smarter and liberated in my thinking, and even if it was difficult for me, I was able to rationalize my husband's (past) womanizing. He's also human. In his hours of loneliness, he could also be craving for a shoulder to lean on. Let's not be hard on him, shall we? After all, it's a man's world, too.

At least, he got out of it (or them) before they became too involved. And if the relationship with the other woman (or women) began and ended without me finding out, that he did it very discreetly and as secretive as he could... it could only mean that he still values his family, me included.

Just forgive and move on, as the young people would say.

HALFWAY THROUGH the year, President Marcos granted former senator Benigno Aquino permission to seek medical treatment in the states for his ailing heart. Soon after, a series of bombings. allegedly orchestrated by the April 6 Movement, a newly-formed US-based opposition group, shook Manila. It was also around this time that Gani wrote to us to share the news that he had remarried. And to tell us that since Julian was going to retire in a few years, he was thinking of filing a petition for us to join him in the states, and because it might take years for the petition to be processed, he thinks it wise to file it now and get the approval at around the same time that Julian retired.

"Let's talk about that some other time," I answered him. "When your kuya Jules is finally freed."

Two years had passed since Jules was detained. Colonel Banal of the Judge Advocate General's Office who had a say on his case was suddenly up for promotion. Which meant he would be transferred to another military facility.

Which could mean that cases of political detainees will again be up for a lengthy and tedious study by the next judge advocate general. Out of goodwill and for humanitarian reason, Colonel Banal made a list of those he could already recommend for release. Jules made it on the list.

On Colonel Banal's last day in office, I hurriedly went to Bicutan to at least find out how I could follow up on his recommendation. A sergeant met me in the middle of the camp.

The sergeant was all smiles. "Come, Madam... let's walk together."

"I'm not going straight to the detention yet," I replied. "I have to see Colonel Banal first. I don't want to miss him."

"The Colonel is in there."

Reluctantly, I went with the sergeant.

At the gate of the detention building, he said: "Stay there, Madam, don't go anywhere. Just relax... stay put..."

Maybe the sergeant was telling me to wait for Colonel Banal outside the building? I was pressed for time to see Colonel Banal but decided to just "stay put".

And in a bit came a group of detainees heading for the gate and singing *"We Shall Overcome."* I could not, for a moment, comprehend what it was all about. Until I spotted the one they were shaking hands with, putting their arms around and embracing.

I will never ever forget that moment, just like a most memorable scene from a movie. They were all ecstatic as they walked my Jules to the gate!

Smiling, the guard opened the gate wider. And Jules met me with a tight embrace.

While the combined voices kept on and on: *"We shall overcome... we shall soon be free!"*

My son. I embraced him tightly, the tightest embrace a mother could give her son. My son. And suddenly, I was laughing and crying at the same time!

A FEW DAYS after Jules came home, Julian had a talk with him. "Your status is legal now, you're no longer on the wanted list. You're free to go back to school if you want, or work if that's what you prefer. Take Mara and Rev, bring them home here with us..."

Jules shook his head and replied slowly and softly. "Dad, a life in the mainstream is not possible for me and Mara anymore. We have pledged our lives to our cause."

"What about Rev? He needs to have a normal life, Jules!"

"You call the misery and injustice against the majority of our people normal?"

"There you go again."

"Dad, don't you still understand? It doesn't mean that we are turning our backs on our children... we are only fullfilling our responsibility to them on a bigger scale. On a scale that is not tied down to our private families, not limited to the narrow and the personal. Rev... he is among the children that we want to give a better and more humane society to. It's for him and all children like him that makes it more important to effect change."

Do I understand now? What about you, Julian, do you understand now?

"I messed it all up again, didn't I?" Julian said to me in an apologetic tone when we were finally alone. "Instead of making your son stay longer with you, it looks like I made him leave earlier than he planned."

"That's alright," I replied. "I never wanted him to walk free for me anyway; I wanted him to walk free for himself. And even before, even when he was still in detention, I somehow knew that the moment he walked free... he would go back to the movement."

"And you don't resent that?"

Smiling, I shook my head. "No," and quoted Martin Luther King just as he did way back, albeit with a bit of revision. "Everyone should have something he should die for. Anyone who had nothing he'd die for is not fit to live."

Julian laughed a little. "I just tried. For you. Although I knew there's nothing I could say that would convince him to stay."

"You knew it?" I asked.

"And if he chose to stay... it would not make me completely happy anyway."

"What? But why?"

"Because in my heart, I know what he's doing... is *right!*"

Somewhere along the way, maybe I just did not notice it, but Julian finally saw it Jules' way, too.

JULES IS INDEED "out there" again. Many of the political detainess who were either set free or escaped from prison are also out there again, together with a number of government officials who defected, priests and nuns who went to their side, students who stepped out of the universities, laborers who were laid off.

But despite the growing number of dissidents, despite encounters still being the norm in far-flung provinces, the government continued to spread the news that the backbone of the National Democratic Movement has been destroyed, that its power is vastly diminished and that it no longer poses danger to the government.

Following this assessment of the situation in the country, on January 17, 1981, the president lifted martial law.

But the critics would not buy the government's propaganda. William Ascher, a World Bank member tasked to closely investigate the political situation in the Philippines, reported that the New Society failed miserably on its promise to alleviate the lives of the citizens based on its supposed agenda of stripping the political and economic powers of the oligarchy. Instead, the people got buried deeper into poverty. Likewise, its insistence that only under martial law would the distribution of wealth be more equitable proved to be extremely self-serving and deceptive. And the scariest thing of all according to the Ascher Memorandum, was that local businessmen were now siding with the National Democratic Movement. They have been immensely affected by the flooding of foreign investments in the country which the critics termed the "era of American recolonialization".

Taking all these into consideration, martial law increasingly became a liability on the part of government.

Still, going by the decrees, general orders, and letters of instruction of President Marcos, the power over the physical, economic, and psychological areas of the republic remains solely in his hands. The writ of habeas corpus remains suspended, the government still has the final say in the fields of banking, agriculture, and trade, the army and PC remain as brutal and as merciless as before, There remains the need for human rights organizations worldwide to continue monitoring the relationship of the military to the citizenry.

With the lifting of martial law, more than three hundred political prisoners were simultaneously released, including former KM leader Nilo Tayag whose arrest in 1970 spawned even more demos and protest actions. The PCPM (Philippine Council for Print Media), tasked to police the print media, was abolished, the strike ban was reviewed. The Batasang Pambansa collected all the previous orders and declarations of the president for close scrutiny, student councils were reinstated, student publications were reopened. Marcos listened to the call for a presidential election and scheduled it in May, and his challenge for anyone to run against him echoed throughout the country.

PETITIONS FOR the writ of habeas corpus were filed in court one after another. Journalists broke free and progressive and oppositionist reading materials sprouted, magazines and newspapers openly attacking the actions of the government, then and now. Young militant writers were born, fearlessly exposing the crimes against humanity including cases of salvaging, most victims of which, it turned out, were not criminal but political elements and often victimizes innocent people; the strategic hamletting and Vietnamization of several provinces in Davao del Sur and Davao del Norte; the assassination of Macliing Dulag, leader of several communities in Kalinga, Apayao opposed to the building of the Chico dam; the massacre in Samar, the massacre in Misamis, massacres here and there; the greed of multinationals, spies scattered around UP, the lives of mistreated sacadas, the lives of mistreated squatters, the lives of mistreated farmers, the lives of mistreated laborers...

The year bore witness to the immediate reorganization of young people who will once more form and hold the student power in their hands. Unions and the fast-growing federation of laborers were consolidated, the name Kilusang Mayo Uno reverberated-- a powerful federation with a membership of more than three hundred thousand and soon, almost the entire population was marching yet again on the streets leading to Plaza Bonifacio, the venue of many protest actions during the premartial law days: ten thousand, twenty thousand, thirty thousand... from Cubao, from Tondo, from Monumento; and every now and then, the battle between students and laborers

on one side and the PC and Metrocom on the other side was erupting once again.

The office of the Ministry of Labor was mobbed with notices of planned strikes. Walk-outs, sit-ins, class boycotts—this time participated in not only by students but also by faculty members—have started yet again. Once again, countless picket lines were seen blocking the gates of companies and factories, schools and restaurants and hotels. The collective voices of the Filipino people letting loose the fury in the heart of a nation forced to be silent for nine years is regaining its voice at last.

This is the rebirth of the pre-martial law years. War is in the offing... and the great chaos is looming ahead!

Chapter 30

AND SURELY I have reason to worry. When Em spent all day and night in some picket line, I knew it was not only to get a feel of the strike and to gather additional input for his article but because he really supported the workers.

"You make me nervous, Em," I told him. "Even if martial law has been lifted, so many people are still getting arrested."

"I'm not doing anything wrong, Mom."

"That's exactly what your brother kept telling me before."

Em said teasingly, "But Jules is really heavy stuff, Mom. I don't carry any deadly weapon."

I smiled a bit. "Isn't there a saying that the pen is mightier than the sword?"

"What shall I do?" Em asked lightly. "Do you want me to be a movie reporter instead? That's the only safe line of writing that I know. You just write bits and pieces of gossip and you earn lots of money."

"You know that's not what I mean."

"Or do you want me to be part of the government press machinery?"

"Of course not!"

"You see? Anyway, I'm not anti-government in this case. Because the picket line I've been to is in Ding Velayo Export Company which, ironically, is owned by a top government oppositionist who supposedly supports the rights of laborers, but in actuality refuses to acknowledge those very same rights. He sure is of different species, isn't he, Mom?" Contempt was evident in Em's tone of voice. "He sure is different!"

"All right," I smiled at him now. "You convinced me."

"Oh? I think you're still worried."

"And I have nothing to worry about?"

"No. Because I have nothing but commitment to my writing."

Commitment. Such an ambiguous word. It encompasses not only the dramatic scenes in a play but the *truth* that a writer embraces and puts into those scenes. One night, Julian and I watched the theater presentation of a play written by Em, and there in its intertwined scenes the injustices against the Filipino masses. The play also features nationalistic songs no doubt composed by artists "on the other side of the fence."

But these kinds of theater presentations are attended not only by progressive groups but by "agents" of government who secretly snoop and spy. Soon after, a few men dropped by the office of the publication where Em submits his articles, with an "invitation" for him and everyone who, one way or another contributed to the production of the play... to a dialogue with the NBI.

At least lawyers committted to defending those accused of "subversive" activities are quick to come to the rescue. Lawyers have formed various organizations, too—FLAG, MABINI, PROTEST, and one organization immediately sent someone to witness the dialogue between the invitees and the investigating panel of the NBI.

I have no idea of the specific details of their meeting because I was not there— Em did not want either me or Julian to come with him because he said he would look like a pansy. But he did come home that afternoon and said that everything went well, nothing untoward happened.

"For now, nothing," I said. "But from this point on, they will be watching you closely, they will monitor your every move. And if they find something to pin you down, Em... the moment they find something to pin you down..."

He shrugged and made a joke of it. "Then it will be me you will visit in the stockade!"

And Em continued with his writing, went on discovering and exposing the prevailing conditions not only in the city but also in the countrysides, voicing out the sentiments of the people regarding certain conditions that are barely heard of or read about. I just often read him now. He just called me via long-distance, but there were times when I don't see him for one or two weeks.

In the years 81-82, I became witness to the deepening involvement of Em and the passion by which he writes. I was not at all surprised when he officially joined a human rights organization as member of its fact-finding committee, tasked to do detailed research on cases of military abuse in different parts of the country: the situation of sugar workers, the social condition in hamletted areas, the Cosmos strike, the strike in Anteliz Hotel in Davao, the Central Mindanao University boycott, the murder of a doctor named Bobby de la Paz, the massacre in Samar, salvaging, the murder of five activists who were taken from a house in Bulacan and whose corpses were even displayed on the ground fronting the municipal hall "to serve as examples" of the fate that may befall those who rebel against the government; Chico Dam, Nuclear Power Plant, Stanford Strike, the case of a woman who fell victim to toxic substances in a factory of electronic parts...

And always, there was no hiding the depth of feelings he has for the people he talked to us about. He would show us pictures of a very emaciated woman and give us a background of her story:

"This is her picture before she got sick. Look at her now, Mom. Look how bloated her face had become, how she's become very skinny and looks totally dried up.

"Because she worked locked up in a room as hot as an oven, because the IC's she handled had to be submerged in chemicals under very high temperature. Imagine yourself locked up in a room like an oven inhaling all the smoke from the lead and silicon around you!" And he would go on to say that it was one of those jobs that the US dumps to Asian countries knowing that they are very hazardous to one's health. "They make sure it's not the Americans who would get sick. No different from the food they dump in this country because it will upset their stomach!"

Yet our government accepts it because, while the workers receive a pittance laying their lives on the line doing this kind of work, "it is a big source of revenue and kickbacks for those in government."

One time, his story was about a barrio named San Vicente:

"The military accused the people of being NPA supporters, giving them food and room for the night. So the military ordered the people to leave, relocated them to a barrio center designated by the authorities. The people had to tear down their houses and rebuild them in the barrio center. The rationale of course was to take away the support base of the NPAs.

"Except the barrio center is too far from the people's farms, about six, ten kilometers away. There are no means of transportation. Every single day, the people have to walk all the way to their farms and back to the barrio center. To make matters worse, the military implemented a free-fire zone ground rule. Curfew is set at five in the afternoon. Naturally the farmers are afraid to stay in their farm later than the time it takes to get back home. If the military shoots them on the street, the military have no accountability."

There's more. Tala Leprosarium. That a Japanese "philanthropist" turned into a laboratory in his quest for the most effective cure for leprosy.

"Imagine people being used as guinea pigs? They test on humans the side effects of certain medicines; whether a combination of two or three kinds proves effective or whether it could be a lethal combination. Philanthropist, huh! Why, Dad... if he discovers the best cure for leprosy, he could sell it to the whole world and make a windfall!"

There's more. A whole lot more. Harrowing stories of cruelty and disregard for human lives.

In view of his deepening involvement in the struggle, it was no longer surprising that one night, Em showed up with someone (whom he left for the meantime in his owner-type jeep) and the first thing he asked me was:

"Mom, are you tired right now?"

I was immediately alarmed. "Tired? Not really. Why?"

"Could you entertain a guest?"

"Sure, why not?"

"Could you nurse him?"

"Nurse him?"

"He's wounded, Mom. But nothing serious. Just scrapes and bruises and a blow on the head. And um... a graze from a bullet!"

"Whaaaat?"

"It's not serious, promise, that's why I just brought him here."

"Wait, wait..."

"There was an incident in the picket line, Mom. The Metrocom attacked us, shooting point-blank. I think there could be some fatalities. I was able to take him away, but I can not take him to a hospital. There's a big chance they will find us there!"

Chapter 31

SEPTEMBER 21, 1982

Exactly ten years ago today, martial law was declared. Ten years.

My children were only this small during that time. Well, no, not that small, really - what I mean is, they were still very young then... nothing amazing about them yet, nor was there any big problem to worry about.

Now, they have each come into his own. Come to think of it, it has been ten years since then, ten years of learning and growing up.

Just yesterday, I got a letter from Gani with the news that Jean, his second wife, had given birth.

"And, Mom, Dad...why don't you think seriously about my suggestion that you come to the states? Life is so much better and safer here. I heard that violence is again taking place there."

Jules has a letter for me too, that as always did not pass through the post office but from hand to hand till it reached me. *For the true freedom of the nation. Jules.* Just like always.

From Em, what I got was a little girl. Oh, at least she is not wounded like the man he once rescued from the picket line, or the old man almost crushed under the weight of a roof that collapsed during a demolition. She was an eight year- old who survived the massacre of the whole Sag-od barrio in Samar in 1981.

You have probably read about it too, the military's attack on a barrio in the dead of night, where all of forty-five residents were forced out of their homes: men, women, children. They were made to stand in line and then shot mercilessly. And she, the little girl Marela, was saved by her sheer presence of mind. As soon as the shooting started, she played dead and did not move until all the soldiers were gone.

All the people she knew were dead. Her family, her playmates...including her mother and father. She was too shocked to even cry.

Then, somewhere in her gruesome surroundings, she heard a cry: the pained cry of a wounded baby. She looked for the baby among the dead, cuddled him, sang him a lullaby, and carried him away towards the house of the captain in the next barrio.

She was only seven years old then. When I read her story, I knew that I will never forget her. I could hardly believe her courage and the manner by which she conducted herself in the face of a most harrowing experience.

"The fact-finding committee in Samar brought her here to testify in the People's Court."

"People's Court?"

"A Human Rights Symposium that will be held at the Christ the King Seminary."

I was both nervous and excited to come face to face with her. "Tell them, Em... that we'll just adopt her!"

Em laughed. "Mom, I know that you have fallen in love with her... but what's left of her relatives will be waiting for her back home."

I left Marela in front of the TV beside Bingo. She and Bingo appeared to ignore each other. Perhaps this was the first time she has seen a tv set so her attention could not be taken away from it, never mind that the program currently playing was in English and she could not comprehend a word being said. Although I know that even if it were in Tagalog, she would find it equally difficult to understand because she only speaks Visayan. It must be the language barrier that kept her and Bingo from speaking to each other.

Bingo, who is now on his first year of college, was as glued to the tv as Marela, watching a crime story. Why, oh, why does this kid love crime stories so much? I must ask him about it sometime. I have long noticed that his favorite tv shows and reading materials have absolutely no bearing to the engineering course that he is taking up.

I went inside Jason's room which, like Jules's room, is now converted into a guest room. I just really need to do this sometimes, help myself get used to the idea that Jason is no longer with us. Because there are still times when I forget... or still deny, the fact that he's gone... and I call for him without meaning to.

I wonder if he could see me whenever I am in his room? Can he still hear me speaking to him? I still cannot accept the circumstances of his death. Even Julian has said that he feels he can never ever accept it. Nor this marijuana thing that was not proven anyway. Regardless of the days and years that pass, regardless of forever... nothing can break our faith in our son.

Sound of "*bang bang*!" coming from the TV. Then a shrill scream. I rushed downstairs. A very terrified Bingo is holding Marela in a tight embrace. The girl who was sitting quietly beside him just a few minutes ago was hysterical.

"Hurry, Mom!" Bingo yelled and I half-ran towards them. Together, we held Marela until she calmed down.

"What's wrong?" I asked, confused. "What happened?"

Bingo was very confused too. "Search me! Maybe she was startled by the gunshots. I don't know! But when the gun appeared in close-up shot and fired... she broke down!"

In a flash, I understood why. In a flash, Bingo also understood why. He himself was jolted by his own narration of what happened. His jaws tightened.

I caressed Marela's hair and cheek. Terror was still visibly written all over her face .

"It's okay," I said. I knew that she could not understand my dialect, but she would at least feel the affection in my voice . "The PC is gone. You're safe now."

After I made her sleep on my lap and told Bingo to carry her into Jason's room, Bingo said to me:

"I'm sorry, Mom."

"Sorry? For what?"

"It did not cross my mind that the scene would impact on her that much."

"Ah!" I laughed sadly. "But neither of us can measure the depth of her trauma." I felt so saddened and guilty recalling how I even told myself that at least, my newest "adopted child" was not wounded, not having the slightest idea that her wounds were deeper and more difficult to heal.

"Since we're already here, Bingo... I've been wondering why you have been watching too many crime stories."

Bingo appeared to grope for words, looked like he did not want to give me an answer. But finally said, almost defensively, "It's not that I get high on crime stories, Mom."

"Now, Bingo, that's not what I mean!"

"I'm just trying to find out... see through the various plots... why..."

My forehead furrowed. "Why what?"

"Why people kill. I mean... I understand that revenge may be the reason in some cases... but why do they kill for no reason at all? What could have been the motive of those who killed Kuya Jason? How can some people be so sadistic? How come the special forces who carried out that Sag-od massacre did not even spare the children? Don't they have any conscience at all? I mean, Mom... killing may be rationalized in some cases, but not when a person, or a group of persons, commit murder just for the heck of it, sometimes even killing their victims slowly, getting high on their agony."

I nodded slowly. "I see."

"I cannot, for the life of me, understand why there are people in this world who seem to find it so much fun to kill. Could it be that they simply get their kick out of watching people die?"

"I understand what you're trying to say, Bingo," I said to put an end to his labored effort to explain his feelings. "I have the same questions myself. Except that I don't know the answers. But I think..." I laughed softly to lighten our conversation. "maybe you should not have taken up engineering. Maybe it should be criminology... or something along that line."

He did not answer. I guess he has already been considering that, actually.

When he finally answered, he did so slowly. "I know someone who took up criminology, and he's now a lieutenant of the PC."

A lieutenant of the PC. In a flash, a scene crossed my mind: a lieutenant of the government army coming face to face with a lieutenant of the "people's army". Brother against brother, guns aimed against each other... Jules and Bingo?

Funny if only it was not too horrifying to imagine.

"Well," I said, "there are lieutenants of the PC who defect, too!"

"Mom?"

"Nothing, I'm just kidding."

Silence. I turned serious now.

"Bingo, do you remember the KAWAL awards? It was on newswatch the other day."

He blinked.

"It's for soldiers involved in humanitarian work. We just forget that there are soldiers who are humane too, due to our preoccupation with bad news about them. Military doctors, military men involved in socio-economic projects, sports development, green revolution instead of armed revolution, rescue and relief operations, rehabilitation activities..."

"Of course, Mom!"

"So you see, what is important is the man himself."

"Sure, sure, I know! But, Mom, I never said that I would join the PC!"

"But as early as now, you already feel insecure that if ever you shift to criminology, you would be in the PC."

Bingo bowed his head. "I don't want to disappoint Dad. I want him to have at least one of us following in his footsteps."

"There's only one thing that would make Dad happy," I said sincerely. "And that is to see all of you happy in the respective paths you choose."

SO NOW, THEY have each pursued a life of his own: from Jules down to Bingo. It won't be long before Julian and I will be left on our own. Just the two of us together, exactly like when we started.

And tonight, I voiced out to him the same concern I had voiced out to him a few years back:

"I wonder how we would be once all the children have completely left us."

"Your children will not completely leave us," Julian answered, sounding very confident. "They will come back home to us every now and then. To bring us grandchildren...or maybe...someone to give home to for a few days."

"So?..." I laughed heartily. So what's the problem? It makes me happy anyway. It brings me joy being the temporary mother and nanny of the wounded but brave people of our times.

I was saying something and I stopped in mid-sentence, suddenly realizing that all along, I have the answers to the questions that I carried in my mind for many years, about my own significance as a person. I have nursed young and old strangers back to health and that is no mean feat. Over the years, I have steadily recognized the need for change and embraced the dream that my firstborn brought into my home. Maybe the same is true with Julian. If he had said that what Jules was doing is right, it could only mean that he too, had allowed the same dream to take seed and grow in his heart. We have both become silent participants in the struggle and I am not, in any way, an incomplete person.

"It makes me nervous sometimes," said Julian, but he followed it with a grunt, as if on second thought, "Hmm, why should I feel nervous, anyway? It's good that somehow, we're doing something to help."

I laughed heartily once more. Because I remember that first time that while he kept on griping and complaining, he was handing me cotton and sterile water and actually helping me clean the wound of a young stranger. He was really scared and yet, he did what he felt he must do.

"Why, isn't it a good thing to be able to help inspite of being nervous?" He asked with a bit of defensiveness in his tone.

I was still laughing. "Of course it is! And I loved you the most that night!"

"Now you're trying to amuse me."

I touched Julian's cheek. "No, I'm not. Cross my heart."

Julian finally laughed softly. "Okay, I can accept that. Now, you have a letter to answer tomorrow."

"From Jules?"

"From Gani. Tell him once and for all that we won't be going to the States. Tell him we're staying put. The struggle is here."

"I will. Of course I will!" I groped for the switch of the lampshade, turned it off, and snuggled to Julian.

In Conclusion

AS I WRITE this, the Philippines' external debts have soared to $17B, particularly to the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, two international lending institutions both consisting of more than one hundred and thirty member countries, but are both dominated and controlled by the United States.

Basically, what the World Bank wanted was to turn our country into a giant plant of products that will cater to the needs of other countries. This system is problematic because the stability of an export-oriented economy is completely dependent on the economic stability of the countries it will market its products to. But this is what the World Bank wanted because the United States—who controls the World Bank—had a lot of excess capital that needed to be invested. Except that in the US, consumption is limited and labor cost is high, and expanding businesses domestically will only result in overproduction and failure to recoup the investment. To offset this problem, banks and corporations—that control a big percentage of surplus capital—increased their efforts to do business in third world countries and utilize not only the latter's raw materials but their cheap labor as well.

Because the country had become impoverished due to the officials' greed for political power and corruption in government, the massive spending during election periods using money from the national coffer, coupled with the stagnation of Philippine industry primarily dependent on imported products, the Philippine government had no choice but to abide by the dictates of the World Bank.

Our foreign exchange reserve was dangerously down and we were compelled to borrow a huge amount from the World Bank, opening the opportunity for the World Bank to impose on us its idea of "liberalization" – or creating the "right climate" for the free entry of foreign investments into the Philippines. It was necessary to first create the "right climate" because the climate was not conducive at the time; there were too many oppositionists in Congress and among the members of the Constitutional convention, not to mention the laborers and students unleashing their fury in full intensity to oppose the presence of American businesses in the Philippines. So as not to further stoke the chaos taking place, even the formerly conservative Supreme Court of the Philippines was forced to issue decrees that were not favorable to US investors. By virtue of the controversial "Quasha Decision" for example, the Supreme Court declared that Philippine lands that went to the possession of America since 1945 were acquired illegally and must be returned to the hands of the Filipinos.

The Supreme Court's decision shook the international finance circles.

The declaration of Martial Law on September 21, 1972, therefore, was a most significant step towards creating the "right climate" for the free and safe entry of the World Bank into the country, completely placing us under its power. Only through martial law did the president gained the power to abolish Congress and silence the opposition and to illegalize all kinds of mass actions.

Because for the World Bank to carry out its purpose in our country, it was of utmost importance that the country first gain political stability, which was paramount to the stability of American investments. Steps were taken to help the country attain political stability like lending us money for rural development projects such as irrigation, infrastructure, rural credit schemes, highway constructions, and land settlement. But instead of benefiting the poor, it was the giant landlords and agribusiness corporations that gained the most from them. Lands for farming were converted into plantations of coconut, sugarcane, pineapple, and banana--which benefited from the irrigation projects--which the Philippines sells to other countries, which in turn created an scarcity of these produce for local consumption resulting in the demand for higher prices. Since these plantations are owned by foreign corporations that have superior agricultural technology and superior standing in the international marketing system, they were also the ones who gained the most from our agricultural products. Just halfway through the '70's, multinational corporations through direct and indirect systems of land grabbing, have already gained ownership of hundreds of thousands of hectares of farmlands. But while agricultural lands were being converted into export crops, food production that used to serve the needs of the domestic market were being lost.

The Masagana 99 project was then implemented, allowing small farmers to avail of a low-interest, no-collateral credit system to give them opportunity to join the agricultural programs of the government. This was also supported by the World Bank. But an extensive propaganda campaign promoting the use of imported fertilizers and pesticides was attached to it through the giant advertising company J. Walter Thompson. The high cost of these fertilizers and pesticide and modern rice technology, plus the interest on the land amortization, ate up most of the farmers' income from the harvest and left them with almost nothing for themselves and their families. It was instead the huge plants of agrochemicals owned by multinationals that became the real beneficiaries of Masagana 99; the sale of their fertilizers and pesticides ballooned ten times: Shell, Bayer, Union Carbide, Warner Barnes, and others. And to think that almost all of them were accused of selling dangerous pesticides in their own countries! Thus, Masagana 99 became an epic failure.

The Philippines defaulted on its loan payments for the irrigation projects financed by the World Bank, which only succeeded in destroying people's ancestral lands to give way to the building of gigantic dams. Families were evicted to the hillsides which also suffered from erosion. The government decided to go into massive planting on the hillsides to curb the erosion, and the government borrowed more money from the World Bank to finance this project of massive planting, again forcing the people to move to even higher parts of the mountains.

The World Bank's rural development projects in the Philippines came hand in hand with its meddling on the problems of the urban communities. The World Bank did not like the demolition and relocation program of Imelda Marcos and so it proposed the upgrading of slum communities as an alternative. But while the World Bank drumbeated its housing projects as intended for the very poor, like in Tondo for example which they said has the largest slum community in Asia, like any other bank, foremost in its agenda is the fair return on their investment. Housing projects in Dagat-dagatan and all those under the National Housing Authority, just like Imelda's housing projects, were priced not only beyond the reach of the very poor but even beyond the reach of the ordinary poor. In time, the reference to these housing projects as "intended for the very poor" was deleted, as the families in the upper income groups were increasingly accommodated.

In short, those who gained the most from the housing projects of the government financed by the World Bank were not the informal settlers whose homes were demolished to give way to modernization projects and foreign investments but people who have money and wanted to take advantage of the low-cost housing for whatever reason.

While the World Bank made it appear that people are free to participate in decision-making concerning projects in their respective communities, in truth, their upgrading efforts in slum communities were done under authoritarian control. Banks in themselves are authoritarian institutions that shiver at the idea of a free and democratic participation of the people in their projects. This was clearly exposed when they sided with the government in its dictatorial effort to crush the opposition to the upgrading scheme it planned in Cagayan de Oro:

Mayor Aquilino Pimentel's stand was clear: Cagayan de Oro cannot shoulder the city's contribution to the project. Most of all, many of the informal settlers who were supposedly the beneficiaries of the project would not be able to meet the amortization conditions. In the end, he would only be forced to make the people leave, based on the contents of the contract saying that the viability of the project depends on efficient collection procedures. "And that, NHA and local governments must be prepared to enforce contract agreements in cases of default."

In 1981, Mayor Pimentel was removed from office. Tens of thousands of Cagayan de Oro residents held demonstrations to protest his ouster, forcing Malacañang to reinstate him. However, in April, 1983, Pimentel was arrested and charged with subversion.

To be sure, the technocrats in Philippine government were themselves getting worried over our lack of a heavy industrial base. In 1979, the government had planned to establish eleven national projects, but the World Bank/IMF refused to support those projects because they did not comply with the World Bank's policy of export-oriented, labor-intensive manufacturing. As a result, prospective financiers rejected the projects and completely extinguished President Marcos' desperate attempt to salvage the economy.

The value of the peso continued to plummet, the Philippines' debt to the World Bank continued to soar. In the government's desire to pay back its loans, it tried to generate additional income by imposing additional taxes to the citizenry. Aside from the annual direct taxes the people were under obligation to pay, indirect taxes were imposed on big industries, especially those along the line of importation which the industries passed on to the consumers. Oil and gasoline being imported products were taxed heavily, which resulted in the price hike of gasoline, which resulted in fare hike, which in turn resulted in the price hike of all consumer goods that cannot be transported from supplier to market without the use of gasoline, including rice, meat, fish, vegetables, and others.

On the whole, during the past decade, the Philippines was turned into a testing ground for many World Bank projects on rural development and urban-upgrading schemes. Most significantly, it was in the Philippines that the World Bank carried out its first large-scale experiment on technocratic, authoritarian modernization. With the failure of their experiments here, we were buried deep in debt to them, and scared with the possibility of us completely reneging from our obligation which will translate to the loss of their multibillion dollar investments, as early as 1981, the World Bank attached our whole nation as collateral to the tune of 15 billion dollars.

This is what is called the "era of American recolonialization-- colonization without occupation.

In the final analysis, the World Bank which in the beginning aimed to help us gain political stability, albeit for the expansion and protection of American interests in the Philippines, succeeded only in pushing our country into greater poverty that unsurprisingly spawned more rebellion and made the resistance movement fiercer and more resolute to win the struggle.

TONIGHT, WE WATCHED an Independence Day theatrical presentation at the Araneta Coliseum. How surprising it is that the audience reached more or less thirty thousand, especially since the presentation coincided with the traditional celebration in Luneta that featured not only speeches from government officials but also a parade of movie stars.

Government agents were allegedly scattered around Araneta, but that did not deter the bishops, writers, and labor leaders from delivering their fiery speeches and calls to action. *"Free all political prisoners!"* and the people cheered and applauded. *"Stop the issuance of presidential commitment orders!"* and the people cheered and applauded. *"Push the struggle of the Filipino masses!"* and the people cheered and applauded.

Someone yelled, *"The battle cry of the nation!..."* The coliseum almost exploded with a single response: *"Revolution!"* and I was overwhelmed with the daring and fearlessness of the thirty thousand people around me.

As one speaker said: "In this hall, we are not celebrating Independence Day... we are celebrating the continuing struggle of the Filipino people. While on various stages of the

larger society, scenes of resistance keep on unfolding, scenes that will wipe out the opppresssors of the great masses of the people!"

And the characters and audience sang in one voice:

Land dear and holy
Cradle of noble heroes
Never shall invaders
Trample thy sacred shore.

In collective voices booming louder and more determined:

But it is glory ever
when thou art wronged
For us thy children
to fight back and kill!

They have brazenly changed the lyrics of the national anthem. No longer to die for but to kill in defense of the country. The Filipinos have ceased suffering in silence. We have all become revolutionaries.

The voice of revolution has become louder and most determined, the courage of the Filipino is now much stronger, the struggle for real independence intense and unabated... it will go on and on, until the dream for true democracy and freedom finally becomes a reality.

—o0o—

and the struggle continues...

AFTER THE PEOPLE power revolution of 1986 that ousted Ferdinand Marcos, nothing "dramatic" happened in the political arena except for a few failed attempts at coup d'etat that challenged the presidency of Cory Aquino and the ouster of another president, Joseph Estrada, in 2001. But before Estrada, there was Fidel Ramos, Aquino's successor, who allowed the repatriation of the body of Marcos who died in exile in 1989, on the condition that it would be buried in his hometown in Ilocos. The Marcoses however, opted to keep the body in a refrigerated crypt, waiting for a sympathetic president who would allow his transfer to the Libingan ng mga Bayani (Heroes' Cemetery). The wait took all of 27 years.

To be sure, the Marcoses still enjoyed a fairly large following in that northern part of the country. Former first lady Imelda Marcos was elected four times to the House of Representatives. Daughter Imee Marcos became governor of her hometown and later, senator. Ferdinand (Bongbong) Marcos also became senator. I think our generation became too complacent to notice that the Marcoses were slowly paving the way for their ultimate return to power. It did not help that schools and textbooks did not truthfully discuss the real situation under the Marcos regime that when it started coming out into the open, many young people were confused because what we were saying conflicted with what they learned in school.

The unlearning process—or should I say unsettling developments?—started to happen when Bongbong Marcos ran for vice president in the 2016 electoral process where Rodrigo Duterte, friend and ally of the Marcoses, ran for president, although they were not in the same political party. The militants became hard-pressed to block his family's political comeback. Narratives of his father's corruption and abuse of power, accounts of torture, murder and disappearance of thousands of suspected communists exploded on social media.

But social media was also exploited by his and Duterte's supporters. A community of paid "trolls" was born, extolling the "better" accomplishments of Marcos, the buildings and bridges that he built, and how he was supposed to be the best president this country ever had. Soon this community of trolls was spreading fake news. Even the government's official gazette was edited in an attempt to play down the events leading to '86, made it appear that Marcos stepped down from office to "avoid bloodshed" instead of him being oustered through people power. Social media was stormed by a barrage of negative comments and accusations of historical revisionism directed not only against the Marcoses but also against agencies of the government. The Gazette was forced to make a compromise and deleted the most controversial words "to avoid bloodshed."

Bongbong Marcos lost to Leni Robredo by a margin of just more than 263,000 votes. He protested and filed for a recount at the Presidential Electoral Tribunal but refused to concede even after the margin of votes increased by several thousands in favor of Robredo, and even after the tribunal unanimously dismissed his petition for lack of merit.

Meanwhile, Rodrigo Duterte was catapulted to the presidency.

EVEN EARLY in the campaign period, Duterte already made it known that he was fully in favor of Marcos' burial at the Libingan. He himself admitted that the Marcos children contributed a large amount to his campaign fund.

There was of course a strong opposition on the part of the victims of martial law. A petition for restraining order was filed at the Supreme Court which the petitioners lost by a vote of 8-5. Just hours after the Supreme Court penned its decision and less then five months after Duterte was sworn into office, on November 18, 2016, Marcos' body was clandestinely flown from his mausoleum in Ilocos and interred at the Libingan under cover of night, rendering the appeal for reconsideration moot and academic.

Duterte has a lot of similarities with Marcos, except perhaps that both Mrs. Duterte and his present partner stayed away from the limelight, so unlike the flamboyant Imelda who kept herself very visible and made sure she shared equal power with her president husband. In November, 2018, Imelda was sentenced to 42 years in prison for seven counts of graft charges, but no warrant of arrest has been issued so she remains free. Likewise, cases of corruption against former president Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, another friend and ally of the new administration, were dismissed.

Duterte is ruling the country much the same way that Marcos did. Following his open declaration of war against drug users and dealers for example, killing has stopped being just a night job but in many cases done even in daytime, rampantly and with impunity. Over 20,000 cases were reported in the first two years of his presidency, most of which were classified as "homicide under investigation". The fate that befell Jason in this novel is repeated over and over in the persons of very young people, most notably Kian de los Reyes, 17, who was picked up by a team of Caloocan police and killed just a few meters away from his house; and the twin murder of friends Carl Arnaiz and Reynaldo de Guzman, 19 and 14 respectively, who were abducted late at night and whose bodies were found in different dumpsites days apart.

A case has been filed against Duterte at the International Criminal Court in connection with this high number of killings. Immediately after the ICC started its preliminary examination on the case, Duterte withdrew the Philippines' membership at the ICC.

Regarding historic and maritime rights at the West Philippine Sea, during the presidency of Benigno Aquino III, the Philippines filed arbitral proceedings against China at the Permanent Court of Arbitration under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Seas (UNCLOS). The Philippines won the arbitral proceedings but despite this legal victory, China continued its unabated construction of islands and military posts on Philippine territorial waters and harassment of our fishermen. Sometimes, Duterte would send note verbale or diplomatic protests to China's ambassador to protest China's activities but mostly he just let it go, saying that he did not want to go to war with China. Instead, he embarked on developing super-friendship with the superpower, even once saying that China can attach the Philippines as its province.

He pushed for the impeachment of Ombudsman Conchita Carpio Morales after her agency said it was investigating the Duterte family's wealth. He said "selective justice" and the "use of falsified documents" would form part of the impeachment case against Morales. Carpio-Morales retired in July, 2018 without any impeachment case being filed against her.

Supreme Court Chief Justice Maria Lourdes Sereno, who stood up against Duterte's policies on his drug war, also faced impeachment by Congress on the ground that she committed corruption and betrayed public trust in the "misuse" of P18 million in public funds. The impeachment process was preempted by the filing of a quo warranto petition by Solicitor General Jose Calida. In an unprecedented move seen by many as the culmination of efforts by the Duterte administration to unseat her, and denounced by several quarters as a mockery of the Constitution, Sereno was ousted from the Supreme Court by a vote of 8 to 6.

Senator Leila de Lima, who dared investigate Duterte's human rights violations when he was still Davao City mayor and she, the justice secretary, was put behind bars for alleged involvement in drug trade, making good his promise that he would destroy her. De Lima was acquitted in one of three cases filed against her but remains in jail pending resolution of two more cases in the regional trial court.

On January 10, 2017 Rappler founder Maria Ressa, an online news site that has published articles critical of President Duterte, was slapped by a businessman with a cyber-libel case that stemmed from an article published in 2012. She was sentenced to 6 years in prison but was granted bail while her conviction is on appeal. Largely seen as part of the government's crackdown against media outlets critical of President Duterte, the high-profile case hogged international headlines. Maria Ressa is also facing tax evasion charges and Rappler, for "violating a clause in the constitution that limits media ownership to Filipino citizens."

Congress denied the renewal of franchise of ABS-CBN, the largest radio and television network in the country and another of Duterte's perceived enemies. The giant network, first sequestered by the Marcos regime upon the declaration of martial law and was returned to its rightful owners after the people power revolution, was again closed down.

Members of human rights organizations are subjected by Duterte to endless cuss words, most famously "*putang ina*" (son of a bitch). Even former US President Barack Obama and Pope Francis were not spared. Obama, should he ever dare raise human rights concerns in the Philippines and Pope Francis, when his entourage caused heavy traffic in Edsa during his visit in the country.

He has a long list of anti-woman statements that almost always centered on the woman's vagina, which at least Marcos never did, and which encouraged a spate of misogynistic posts both on social media and in private messages.

He joked that if any of his soldiers rape women under martial law, as long as they keep it to just three cases, he would personally claim responsibility for it. On a serious note, he once said that government soldiers can shoot NPA women on their vagina. He even once challenged a former senator to lend him the former senator's wife so he can prove how virile he still is.

How he sees women in general is also evident in the way he repeatedly drills into the heads of the populace that women are not cut out for the demands of the office of the president, actually saying that he would not want Robredo to take over the presidency in the event of his death or incapacitation (he is said to be suffering from various illnesses), or be president through the electoral process in 2022.

Duterte's repeated pronouncement during the campaign period that he would stop the contractualization of workers is yet to materialize. In 2018, we saw a repeat of the Marcos years where there was a serious shortage of rice and people had to line up for a kilo or two of this primary staple. Inflation rate jumped to 4.7 percent in the first quarter of 2021. Corruption in government remains unabated. With the spread of covid 19 that necessitated the lockdown of many communities in the country and the succeeding stoppage of business activities, the economy continues to dip down and more and more people are experiencing hunger and poverty. The country's foreign debt, including of course money borrowed for his build build build projects, ballooned to several trillion pesos.

Covid 19 also witnessed the cruelty by which the authorities treated those who violated the health protocol. Just like what the military did to political detainees during martial law, both the police and barangay officials subjected them to physical abuse and indignities. Cases of rape were also reported. At least one was shot dead just because he refused to lie face down on the street. The man turned out to be a former soldier who was among those deployed in Marawi City during the Maute seige in 2017 and was suffering from war shock.

Peace talk with the CPP has been cancelled and resumed, cancelled and resumed until finally, the CPP was officially declared a terrorist organization by the president.

On June 1, 2020, Duterte certified as urgent a proposed tougher law against terrorism, clearing the way for Congress to fast-track the passage of the controversial anti-terrorism bill that clamped down on Filipinos' basic freedoms, which he immediately signed into law. Protest actions against the law were violently dispersed and rallyists arrested. The law is presently being challenged at the Supreme Court, particularly its provisions designating individuals and organizations as terrorists without due process, and arbitrary arrests and detention of those accused for prolonged period of time without bail.

Presumably to protect the students from communist infiltration but is seen by the majority as a move to arrest the growing militancy of the students, on January 15, 2021, Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana unilaterally scrapped the 1989 agreement with the University of the Philippines, which guaranteed the safety of students from unwarranted entry and operation of police and military personnel on its campuses. It was later expanded to cover other universities.

If before Duterte was telling the police to *"kill, kill, kill!"* those drug users, now his latest kill order was directed against the insurgents. Just two days after his pronouncement, simultaneous raids were conducted in different areas in southern Luzon. Nine were killed and six were arrested, all members of various cause-oriented groups.

Fake news and red-tagging by both the military and Duterte's followers continue to proliferate, further endangering the lives of students, writers, journalists, ordinary citizens, and human rights lawyers. Even efforts to foster the *bayanihan* spirit (volunteerism) among people were labeled as the handiwork of the communists. The young woman whose initiative inspired countless groups of people through her idea of a community pantry was red-tagged by both one communications undersecretary and the spokesperson of NTC-Elcac (National Task Force to End Local Communists Armed Conflict), prompting lawyers and even government officials to come to her defense and the national security adviser to issue a gag order against the Usec and the spokesperson.

The surge of covid 19 has reached critical level. Hospitals are overflowing with covid patients and more are being built to accommodate the increasing number of cases. Even evacuation centers are being turned into quarantine facilities. With the death toll rising each day, social media has started to look like a publishing house for online obituaries.

Many attribute the spread of the virus on Duterte's inability to properly address the issue, starting from the time he refused to disallow the entry of Chinese citizens in the country despite the outbreak of the highly contagious virus in China where it actually originated. Even with the vaccination program going on, the situation has become worse than when it started. Covid and its attendant problems have become the biggest, most primary concern of the people that all other issues seem to have been pushed in the background, like the continuous drilling of China in our territorial waters and their destruction of our marine life, their insistence that the Julian Felipe reef which is very much within our Kalayaan group of islands is theirs and adamant refusal to leave despite all our diplomatic protests, their increasing aggressiveness and seeming determination to take ownership of the entire West Philippine Sea. Gone are the days when social media was flooded with jokes and lighthearted banter while everyone was waiting for the president's late night addresses to the nation. Maybe we are no longer watching. Maybe we have gotten tired of hearing the same things over and over that we are simply not listening anymore.

Maybe this pandemia has drained both our physical and intellectual energy that we even ignore that some of those in the ruling party are already focused on the 2022 presidential election. That long before the start of the campaign period, tarpaulins urging presidential daughter Sara Duterte to"run run run" are already up there in many places. That soon after, tarpaulins urging Bong Go, best friend and confidant of Duterte, to "go go go" also appeared—he already announced that he would run if Rodrigo Duterte himself would run as his vice-president (the Constitution prohibits a president from running for the same position on a consecutive term), prompting Manny Pacquiao, boxing legend and president of PDP-Laban to warn members to stop their political moves that are unauthorized by the party. Talks have it that he is also eyeing the presidency. Yes, they all belong to the same grand alliance of political parties. Bongbong Marcos meanwhile made it clear that despite his loss to Robredo, he is also running again, maybe this time for the highest government position.

Is infighting brewing among friends and allies in the Duterte administration? That, we don't care. Will another Duterte or another Marcos, or any of their allies take over the reign of government in 2022? All of them have the money and the machinery to sustain a very extensive and very expensive campaign, any of them can very well win the next election. Or will there be any election at all?

That, we should all care about. We should all care about our sovereignty and our democratic rights.

The opposition is consolidating its forces through the movement ISambayan. The *"dilawans"* ("yellows". Yes, the trolls call us by many colors) continue risking their lives trying to raise the political awareness of the citizenry, but at this point in time, the question of politics is farthest from the mind of many of our people; they are already too stressed confronting the most basic problems like where to get the next meal.

I suspect that the ordinary red-taggers feel empowered just by red-tagging those who, in their imagination, are "reds". Many probably do not even know the divide between terrorism and legitimate dissent, between communism and activism, that they simply do not understand the word repression. That the noisier Duterte supporters are giving themselves as much exposure as they can hoping that their rantings will finally be heard and they will be rewarded with say, some government position. Blind to the true color of nationalism, the word repression is either ignored or simply does not exist in their consciousness.

But if repression remains alien to the eyes that cannot see, it can also breed young voices unafraid to speak out against the trampling of their freedom. Although they have not yet reached the point of militancy that defined the youth of the '70s, they have at least found their voices, on the streets, in social media, and in the arts. Hopefully, from their rank will be born writers who will later chronicle the events that continue to unfold in our society, to keep the succeeding generations in touch with our history and the unending struggle of the Filipino people.

Lualhati Bautista
April 28, 2021

Writer's Literary and Recognition Awards

IN LITERATURE:

GAPO, novel: grand prize, Carlos Palanca Memorial Awards for Literature, 1980;

DEKADA '70 (The Seventies): novel: grand prize, Carlos Palanca Memorial Awards for Literature, 1983;

BATA, BATA, PA'NO KA GINAWA, (How Children are Created) novel: grand prize, Carlos Palanca Memorial Awards for Literature,1984;

TATLONG KUWENTO NG BUHAY NI JULIAN CANDELABRA, (Three Stories in the Life of Julian Candelabra) short story, first prize, Carlos Palanca Memorial Awards for Literature, 1982;

BUWAN, BUWAN, HULUGAN MO AKO NG SUNDANG, (Moon, Send Me a Knife) short story, 3rd prize, Carlos Palanca Memorial Awards for Literature, 1983.

IN FILM:

SAKADA, (Seasonal Workers, co-writer), 1976: Catholic Mass Media Awards, 1976

BULAKLAK SA CITY JAIL, (Cage Blossoms) 1984: best story/ best screenplay, Metro Manila Film Festival; best story/best screenplay, First Star Awards; best screenplay, Film Academy Awards; finalist for best story/best screenplay, FAMAS Awards; finalist for best screenplay, URIAN Awards;

KUNG MAHAWI MAN ANG ULAP, (Even When Clouds are Gone) 1984: nominee, best screenplay, Film Academy Awards;

SEX OBJECT, 1985: nominee, best story/best screenplay, Star Awards;

KADENANG BULAKLAK, (Flower Chain) 1994: best screenplay, FAMAS Awards;

NENA, 1995: best screenplay, Young Critics Circle Award;

ANG LIHIM NI MADONNA, (Madonna's Secret) 1997: nominee, best screenplay, Film Academy Awards;

DESAPARESIDOS, (THE DISAPPEARED) 1998: 3rd prize, National Centennial Literary Contest, screenplay category;

BATA, BATA, PA'NO KA GINAWA, (How Children are Created) 1998: best story, FAMAS Awards; best screenplay, Urian Awards; best screenplay, Young Critics Circle; best story/ best screenplay, PASADO; best screenplay, Star Awards; nominee, best story/best screenplay, Film Academy of the Philippines; recipient, The Millineum Film Festival Recognition Award;

GUSTO KO LANG LUMIGAYA, (SEARCH FOR HAPPINESS) 2001: nominee, best screenplay, Film Academy of the Philippines;

DEKADA '70, (THE SEVENTIES) 2002: best story/best screenplay, PASADO (Film Organization of Critics and Professsors); best screenplay, Star Awards; best screenplay, Film Academy of the Philippines; best screenplay, Urian Awards; best story/best screenplay, Young Critics Circle. Official entry of the Philippines to the Oscar Awards, 2003;

IN TELEVISION:

ISANG KABANATA SA LIBRO NG BUHAY NI LEILANI CRUZALDO, (A Day in the Life of Leilani Cruzaldo) 1987: best drama story for tv, Catholic Mass Media Awards

TAGHOY SA DILIM, 1994: (A Cry in the Dark) best teleplay, 1st GMA Rainbow Award;

Main writer: PIRA-PIRASONG PANGARAP (Pieces of Dreams) best drama anthology for 5 consecutive years, Star Awards for Television, 1997-2002;

Writer: BALINTATAW, (Illusions) MAMA and DEAR TEACHER, awardees for best tv drama anthology, Cultural Center of the Philippines;

RECOGNITION AWARDS

Gawad CCP Para sa Sining sa Larangan ng Literatura (CCP Award for literary arts) Cultural Center of the Philippines, 2020

Gawad Laurel (Laurel Award) Lyceum of the Phils University Manila,2020

Lifetime Achievement Award, Penmasters League, 2020

Dangal ni Balagtas Award (Pride of Balagtas Award), Komisyon ng Wikang Filipino (Commission on Filipino Language) 2017

Special Recognition Award in Literary Arts, Colegio de San Juan de Letran, 2014;

Recipient, Cecilia Hildegard Award, St. Scholastica College, for reflecting women's voices in her works 2009;

Diwata Award for best writer, 16th International Women's Film Festival, UP Film Center, 2006;

Outstanding Achievement in Screenplay Writing, The Feminist Centennial Film Festival, 2005;

Exhibit in recognition of her outstanding works, Ateneo University Library of Women's Writings, Ateneo de Manila University, 2004;

Most popular writer, Guillermo Mendoza Memorial Scholarship Foundation (An annual award-giving body for film) 2003;

National Achievement Award for Literature, Writers" Union of the Philippines. 1999;

Outstanding Women Artists Lifetime Achievement Award, 1994;

Recognition Award, Institute of National Languages, 1987.

OTHERS:

National fellow for fiction, UP Creative Writing Center, 1986;

Invited as the sole Filipino delegate to the USIS International Visitors Program, inter-regional conference on American Film, 1986;

delegate, 2nd ASEAN writers conference, Singapore, 1987;

delegate, Asian Women and Media Conference, 1987;

Only Filipina featured in the list of foremost international women writers that include the likes of Isabel Allende (House of the Spirits), Alice Walker (The Color Purple), Isak Denizen (Out of Africa) published in Japan, 1994;

Also included in the list of 100 Women of the Century, (published by Buensalido and Associates and The National Book Store) 2001;

Included in the list of 20 Most Empowered Women, Woman Today, 2002

Some works translated and published in other languages, like DEKADA '70, (Japanese translation, published in Japan); Buwan, Buwan, Hulugar Mo Ako ng Sundang, (Finnish language, published in Finland); Tatlong Kuwento ng Buhay ni Julian Candelabrla, (English, Australia)

Reviews of her works had been published in different magazines and newspapers in other Asian countries;

Chair or Member, Board of judges, various literary, television and film awards: Palanca Memorial Awards for Literature, CCP awards for literature, CCP awards for television, Film Development Foundation Scriptwriting Contest, Film Academy of the Philippines; literary contests of various schools and universities; various years.

Founding member, Concerned Artists of the Philippines Women's Desk;

Founding member, Writers in Cultural and Creative Alternatives;

Member and one-time vice-president, Screenwriters Guild of the Philippines;

Founding member and first president, Kapisanan ng Mga Manunulat ng Nobelang Popular (Organization of Writers of Popular Literature)

Acknowledgments:

BIENVENIDO LUMBERA, who wrote the introduction to this novel, is a professor, poet and dramatist who won the 1975 Carlos Palanca Memorial Awards for Literature, the 1998 National Book Awards of the Manila Critics Circle, the Philippine Centennial Literary Prize for Drama; and the Cultural Center of the Philippines Centennial Honors for the Arts in 1999. He was also recipient of the Ramon Magsaysay Award for Journalism, Literature, and Creative Communication Arts in 1993 and was conferred the National Artist Award for Literature in 2006.

CLARISSE B. DE JESUS has been writing since the age of 9. She had her training in journalism at the age of 11. She was the editor-in-chief of her grade school paper at the age of 12.

She placed 2nd in the National Elementary Achievement Test for the Academic Year 1996-1997. She also placed 5th in the Career Service Examination in October, 2016.

The first time she joined an interschool writing competition for elementary students in Metro Manila, she won first place. The first time she submitted an article to a magazine, it got published. This is why she believes she has beginner's luck when it comes to writing, although she says she is not very confident that this beginner's luck will work in prestigious literary competitions against the country's finest writers.

She is a tutor by day and a writer/blogger by night.

She dreams of having her own novels published. She is from the University of the Philippines.

Cover photo is from the collection of **JASON ANTOLIN,** better known as Kuya So, taken from actual theater presentation of Dekada '70 at the Doreen Black Box Theater, Ateneo University. He studied industrial engineering at the Polytechnic University of Quezon City, theater arts at the University of the Philippines Diliman, and photography at the WeCare Training Center. He is a vlogger, writer, traveller, a photo hobbyist, a theater enthusiast and a volunteer at Teatro Pinagpala in Quezon City.

(Thank you also to the members of the cast for allowing the use of this photo on the cover.)

Other books by the author:

Dekada '70 (original edition, Filipino)

Bata, Bata Pa'no Ka Ginawa (How Children are Created)

Desaparesidos (The Disappeared)

Gapo

Bayan Ko (My Country, a collection of four stories)

Sonata

Sixty in the City

In Sisterhood, Lea at Lualhati

Bulaklak sa City Jail (Cage Blossoms)

Hinugot sa Tadyang (From the Ribs. non-fiction)

Tranquil shores are only for those who
would dare plunge into the raging waters
in the deadliest of storms

– from a political prisoner